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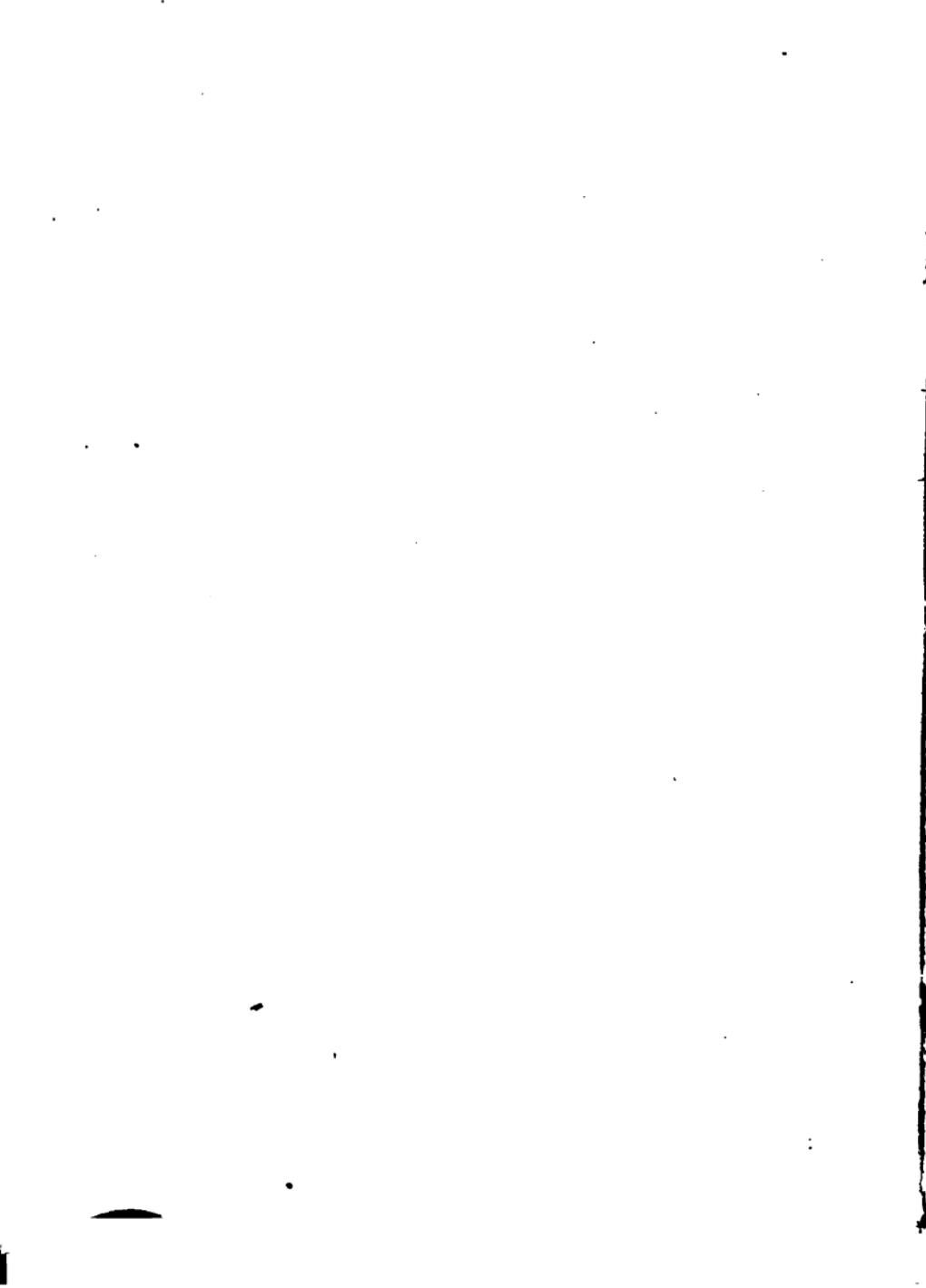
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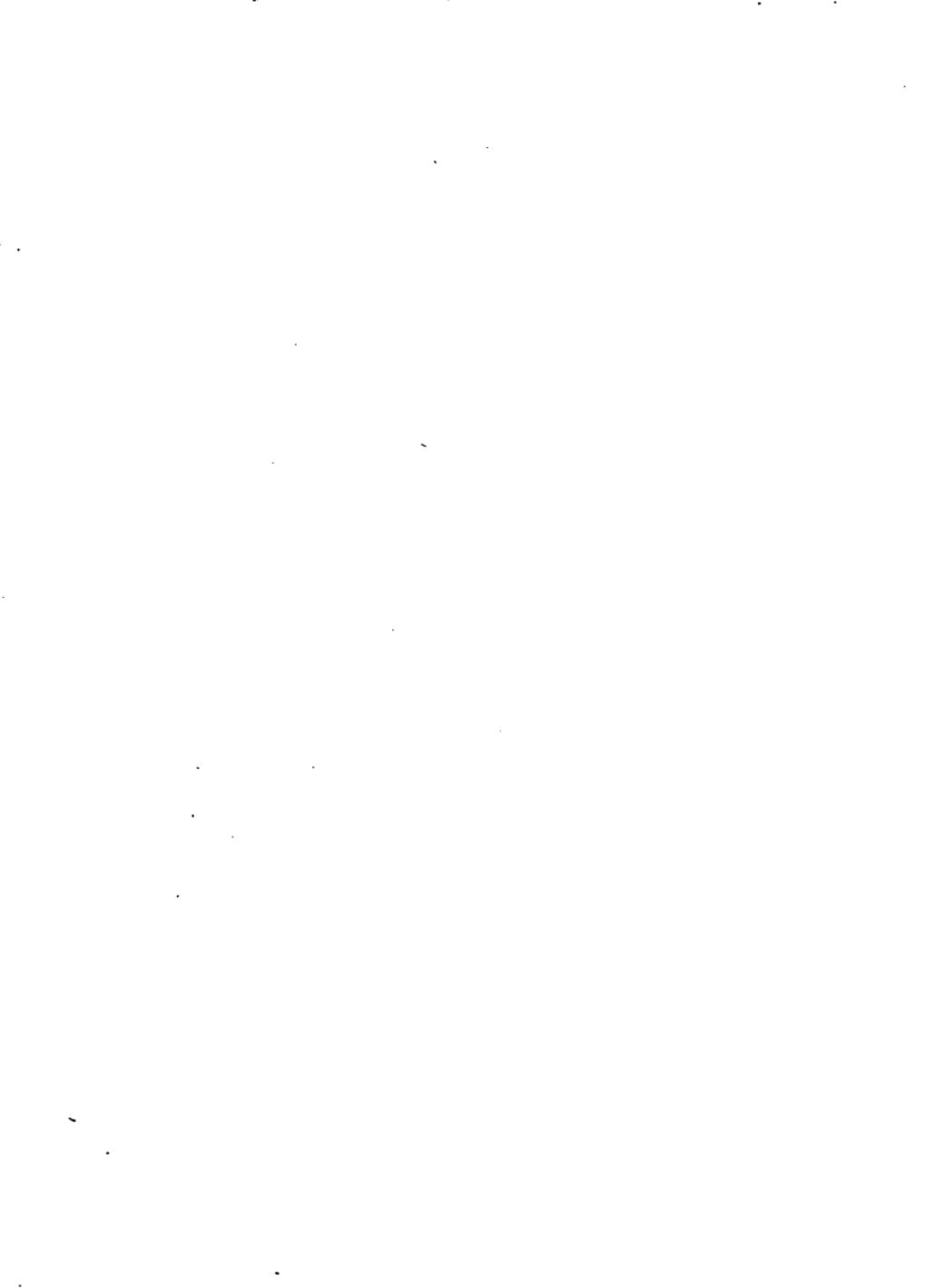
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EARNEST TRIFLER.

(M. A. Sprague)



49

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AN EARNEST TRIFLER.

I.

08-29-33 J.W.C
A FINE, gray mist was rising from the river, and a fine, gray twilight was falling from above, hushing in their gray fold the diligent activities of the country, when two young men, who had that evening arrived in the mountains, were left in possession of their new and unfamiliar quarters. As the door closed behind them the elder, a tall, plain, and unpretentious man, who excited little inquiry and who made few inquiries himself, crossed the room and looked out upon the looming hills as if his interest were in their dark outlines rather than in his more immediate environment; while the other, an alert and more lightly built young fellow, glanced over the walls and furniture as if what he saw was but tributary to impressions already surprising and favorable.

"Who would have thought," he began, "that we would bring up in such a tender locality! Are these the simple natives, and is this the shanty you promised me?" And again he glanced carelessly over the high-hung pictures and the lion's claws which here and there protruded out of the mahogany. "I call it no

better than the civilization we left,— it's older if anything."

"It is a wild country," returned the man at the window, irrelevantly,— "a wild country! I don't recall a worse lock-up anywhere around."

"I thought we were to get off in it somewhere and live like pioneers," pursued the first speaker. "What is the use of working a man up to the stoical point and then putting him to bed in a room like this?" And walking up to a portrait of a military-looking gentleman he surveyed it a moment with the able criticism that he brought to bear upon so many faulty objects. "British!" he exclaimed, in condemnation. Then, as if in search of features of less heavy and offensive nationality, he went over to a long, bisected mirror, where, after due optical refreshment, he adjusted his coarse but finely-fitting clothes.

But the elder, Jared Dayton, was not to be diverted from the landscape by the humors of his friend. He was a man of affairs, and at all times, perhaps, a trifle irresponsible. He went on staring and speculating. "For twenty miles," he shortly observed, "it is as impracticable as you see it yonder. No wonder they ran the road into the side of a mountain and left it."

"You'll get through it soon enough and carry emigration with you," rejoined the young fellow, declining the tacit invitation to look out. "I suppose you are longing to go at it now with that brutal energy of yours; but you can't begin to-night. You'd better make yourself comfortable while you can. If we get

that shanty of ours with its ennobling destitution we won't have the same conveniences."

With easy accommodation to new surroundings, which was evidently habitual, he seated himself before a huge hair-cloth sofa on which their luggage was deposited; and opening a portmanteau with his slender, nervous hands, displayed its contents. "This is a fine lot of traps," he said, "to bring into a gentleman's house."

"Guerrin would insist on our coming here," said the other, turning and looking indifferently at the properties to which his attention was thus called. "There seemed to be no choice. We must look around."

"They might domesticate you," suggested his comrade, "after twenty years of hotels and other dens. He still blesses you, don't he, for running that old line through his land? Did you stay here then?"

"Here? I? No, of course not," exclaimed Dayton, as if protesting against the rich imagination which could conceive such an out of character question.

"Then you never met the daughter?" continued his companion, still giving his imagination vent.

"It is n't likely she was born then."

The young man laid aside an assortment of brushes of the kinds best qualified to remove obnoxious particles from the person and clothing of a fastidious citizen, and took a cedar-wood box of rectangular shape from the folds of a coarse, gray blanket. "Don't you believe it," he said smiling. "She is older than that. She may look like twenty, or less, but she has

an eye-beam that resembles twenty-five. She sees. Who sees at twenty?"

Dayton gave it up.

"I believe her long-fringed glance is sticking somewhere through me yet," said the other, his humorous intention growing broader. "She is fair looking for the hills."

A low tattooing recommenced upon the casement gave a grudging assent. It was, in fact, one of many topics broached by his friend, on which Dayton had no opinion. He went on inspecting the horizon as if loth to relinquish the forms which the night was absorbing, and it is not impossible that the loss of such visible objects left him frequently at a loss for satisfactory subjects of contemplation. His common blue eye rested upon nothing more intently than mountains awaiting his skill, and the young man's susceptible and dissipated vision struck him as a doubtful gift, like a musical talent or an hereditary intemperance.

"I would like to know," continued the younger, who was also the brighter man, "what this family has ever done that it should be sequestered here. What the"—

"I have heard," said Dayton, his comrade pausing for a desirable word, "that it was originally for the killing of a king. It was some ancestor,—the regicide, not the king. He came here to hide."

The young fellow laughed. "That beats me," he said, perhaps referring to some pretensions of his own in the way of ancestry. Then leaving the cigar-box

and the brushes upon the bureau, he too went up to a second window, as if drawn by the persistent interest of his chief in what lay without.

Before him were spacious private grounds in which an effort at landscape gardening had once been made, but corrected by subsequent neglect. A semicircular road and a straight path led to the house from three arched gate-ways, and everywhere beyond rose the pine-covered mountains. He looked through the trees and up and down the deserted road, but plainly failed to take a professional interest either in the narrow valley or the gloomy sierras.

"And do they call this wilderness a town?" he inquired.

"There are a few houses down below," replied Dayton; "half of them have steeples. If we can't do any better, perhaps we can get one with a steeple. We'll look around."

To this repeated proposition the young fellow assented. "By all means," he said. "We'll never know any of the delights of barbarism here. There can't be any barbarism where there are women"—and he laughed again. Presently, however, he returned to the idea with more seriousness than he had yet shown. "You are right about it," he declared. "I want to get away. I can't get far enough. I am not far enough yet. I'd rather go into camp with you back on the ridges, or anywhere else, than to go back to France. I've been drawn around, and drawn around, with my pesky susceptibility to drawings till I've lost my direc-

tion. This place is very inviting, but it is n't the inviting we are after. It 's discipline. It 's hardihood. It is n't enough, I take it, that we get out of Boston and begin to dig again. We want to dispossess ourselves of stale ideas and habits,—to rehabit ourselves. I say we. I mean me. You never have any stale ideas and habits. Yours are the sort that improve with age."

Of whatever sort, they were plainly so far improved with age that their owner did not start to quick interest in flattering discussions about himself, and for the twentieth time the young man went on, "As for me," he exclaimed, "I am after some with the dew on them. That 's why I favor the camping project."

As they talked, a tall and slim young girl came along the road and passed quickly into the house. Then there was a knock at the door, and Dayton admitted a servant with lamps.

The young fellow still lingered by the window. In the fresh mud of the road and across a corner of the soggy turf were the prints of the young girl's feet. The toes, he idly observed, were narrow, the heels somewhat pointed, and he said to himself that however sequestered her path, and however primeval her heart, she had shod her simplicity with the shoes of sophistication.

The mist crept up. The darkness crept down. Only things near at hand revealed themselves. Here and there in the turf near the foot-prints, were the heads of earth-smelling blossoms. The spring was far advanced.

II.

A FEW hours before, these two well-dressed strangers had arrived at the little railway station of Beau-deck, with vigor in their well-knit frames, and with a serene hardihood of temper that was in nowise disturbed by the doubtful question of their immediate lodgings.

They were the only passengers, but the wonder was not at the smallness of their number, but at the fact that so desolate a terminus should be treated as a possibly objective point for discriminating travelers. Mountains rose on every side, and only an ox-team, lumbering down the declivity of an ancient covered bridge, betrayed a probable habitation of the valley. The small station-house, resembling a powder-magazine, was bare and empty, and as they stood upon the platform, looking across the turbid little river, even the train which brought them, consisting of an engine and caboose, backed away round the hills with a prolonged hoot of its shrill whistle, indicative of derisive joy at thus leaving them in a trap like those of their own construction.

"Which way is the village?" asked the younger, after taking a brief survey of the lonely situation.

"My dear fellow," answered Dayton, "this is it. You're in it now."

"Then, good heaven, which way is the country!" he rejoined. And with a short suggestion of his sense of humor, Dayton led the way back along the track, from beneath whose unballasted ties the water oozed toward the bridge in which the dust lay thick as the mud without.

Coming thence upon a highway bordered on one side by sycamores and on the other by foot-hills, they had proceeded something like half a mile, when they were approached by a slight gentleman, well buttoned up in a beaver coat which shone in spots. He wore a tuft of gray beard on his chin, and about his mouth were grave depressions which had been dimples when he was younger, and might be so designated still when he smiled, though in his sober moments they were but tokens of the hollowness of things grown old. He had mild blue eyes, and a manner in which great geniality struggled with a diffidence not wholly surmountable. His movements were nervously quick, as, descending from a smart road-wagon, he advanced toward Dayton with outstretched palm.

"Ah, glad to see you," he said, changing from a dull to a brighter red. "Was on my way over," indicating the station. "I'm late, or more probably the train's early,—comes in most any time. We are looking for you,—told my wife you'd be along to-day. You never met my wife. She don't get about much. The men all here — two hundred of them; came in on a gravel train. Everything ready. And this?" he added, taking the younger man's hand in one of his while he

rested the other on his shoulder and looked questioningly at Dayton.

"Is my friend Nathan Halstead. Mr. Guerrin," answered Dayton.

"Glad to see you too, sir," Mr. Guerrin went on, still holding him by the hand and forearm. "Understood there would be two of you; told my wife so. This is my wagon. I've just driven up from the falls,—a good twelve miles. Get in, both of you. Place almost in sight."

"Thank you, but"—began Dayton.

"Get in and we'll talk about it. Ground's damp," pursued Mr. Guerrin, and lifting one leg across the knee of the other, he looked for illustration at the sole of his boot. "I calculated to take care of you while you're here, with your indulgence," he continued. "Big house, not many in it. Not here much of the time myself; too much doing at the falls, but when I'm up would like to talk it over with you. You're in the country now, you know—no hotel. You will have to take quarters where you find 'em. It's five o'clock; nearly supper time. We have dinner at six,—call it supper to please the Misses Desborough,—dinner at six too irregular, you know," and he nodded with a smile as one who knew an easy path around rough places. "Find things much changed, eh?"

"We were on our way to the Center,—there is a place they call the Center?" Dayton began with one hand on the wagon, ready to mount. "If you will be so kind as to take us there."

“What for? A straw-stack? They are the only lodgings left.”

“Nothing so luxurious as that,” said Halstead. “We’ve talked of a tent — of anything — of camping out.”

Mr. Guerrin untied a silk bandana that was wound about his neck and looked curiously from one to the other. Then catching something of Halstead’s rejuvenating smile, “Not in Beaudeck,” he said with decision; and nodding in the direction of Dayton, he added, “He don’t count much on his friends, I take it.”

The house to which they were thus rapidly and unexpectedly driven was one owned and occupied by the ancient family of Desboroughs, and but recently, as one might say, and perhaps incongruously invaded in a matrimonial way by the hospitable gentleman who was now doing its honors. It was a large house — large, respectable, and embowered, with huge wings on either side, spread as if ready for flight. The Desboroughs had always made every preparation for flight, first from English officers, then from hostile red men, then from a too great security which was also obscurity; but this flight they had never taken. They were like a big bird which fails to carry out its eagle intentions, and grows old and inactive on the spot where it built its first nest.

Across the front of the house and across each wing were columned porches facing in three directions and with three tiers of steps leading down to the yard.

The wings were each a single story, but the fluted columns of the façade reached past the upper windows and upheld the gable of the roof. It was painted gray, and its shingles curled up under the elms.

A family tree heavily laden with Desboroughs hung in the wide front hall, and portraits of their soldiers and their missionaries looked darkly down from the paneled walls. High, straight-backed chairs were arranged against the wainscoting; flowers were in the windows, and the stairway, wound upward past a window, also filled with flowers. It was a house to lend character even to frivolous inmates. But its inmates were not frivolous. They were still as in the beginning, smooth-browed and grave, and since the days of Cromwell had laid claims to distinction. Their father was the great Desborough who fled from England after the Restoration, owing to his assistance in the death of Charles the First; and the fact that in the intentions of the monarchists he was beheaded, quartered, and burned in pitch at Charing Cross, did not prevent his establishing a family in the wilds of America, where instead of killing kings they engaged in the no less hazardous occupation of growing up with the country and endeavoring to convert the Pokanokets.

They were a very different family from the unheroic Guerrins, who manufactured countless buttons in an adjoining village, and the alliance between their youngest member and the head of the button establishment had not, even after many years, entirely lost a certain incongruity. But then, perhaps, any marriage with

any Desborough would in itself, at any time, have seemed slightly incongruous.

The two young men, engineers by profession, who had thus been turned from their purpose by the button manufacturer, were shown with brief ceremony into the large and heavily furnished Desborough parlor, where they were shortly joined by three gentlewomen of about the same age and bearing close resemblance to each other.

These gentlewomen were plainly by custom tolerant of such freaks on the part of the nominal head of their household, and lent themselves with resignation, if not with willful pleasure, to his schemes of entertainment. Two of them bowed a trifle stiffly, gauging as far as possible in an instantaneous survey the sincerity of their welcome, but the other, apparently less fearful that cordiality might do violence to her conscience, extended a soft hand to the new-comers whose acquaintance she was invited to make. Her features were long and straight, and her composure was that of a person in whom the seriousness of life precluded a vain self-consciousness.

"My husband frequently brings strangers home with him," she said, addressing Dayton in a soft, monotonous voice. "They are about the only ones we see. We live very quietly here. Too quietly, he thinks. He is a quiet man himself, but he likes talkers. Perhaps you are a talker."

Dayton seated himself in a straight-backed chair instead of the low upholstered one offered him, and

shook his head at expectations so contrary to the fact. "I am afraid not," he answered, regretfully.

"We were expecting you yesterday," she went on, with the same monotonous composure. "You are to have the wing. My husband always want strangers put in the north wing. He has a great many friends. We don't know where he picks them up. The last gentleman who came was from the west, Oswego, I think. He was a starch man. He told us some very interesting things. We think ourselves it is more interesting when people come. You are from Boston, I believe."

"I can't exactly say I live there," said Dayton. "I am at a loss to say where I am from,—from one place about as much as another."

To be addressed by a lady much older than himself, who nicely blended distance with friendly overture, was not without a certain charm to him, though it seldom failed inwardly to embarrass him. In fact, when the attention of any woman was fixed upon him exclusively, the resources of his common imperturbable strength seemed to take wings, and in the midst of his polite reception of such favors he felt a little helpless.

"That is very strange," said Mrs. Guerrin with puzzled earnestness.

"Oh, you must n't think from that," he said, hastening to correct an adverse impression, "that I am a deliberate renegade. It is my misfortune to have claims on no locality."

"One has a claim on the place where one is born," she answered conclusively.

"I'm afraid my birthplace would n't know me," said Dayton, moving his feet about on the much flowered and faded velvet of the carpet. "It was in South America, among the Portuguese."

"That is very strange," repeated Mrs. Guerrin, with faint disapproval.

"I can't lay claims to such a foreign spot as that, you know, without seeming more astray than ever," he went on still apologetically. "It's my business. Another occupation would have fixed me somewhere."

Mrs. Guerrin picked up her knitting work, and held it, without knitting, in her hands. "We are very much interested in your business," she said, giving up the discussion of locality with one of such wild and irrational habits. "It will be a very great change for us. The town won't be what it has been. Mr. Guerrin has been very active in it. He thinks of it at night. It is his pet scheme, and he has done a great deal for it. We think sometimes he has done too much for his own good."

"I hope not," answered Dayton, reassuringly.

"It seems thus far as if the road had only served to take our people off. They have had a fever for the prairie lands. Joseph Morgan was the last who went. He was a very useful man, and one of his sons is in India now, doing mission-work. When the people go they go to the farthest places they can hear of. My husband says when the road runs through others may come in, but we are afraid they won't."

"It will be a great line," he declared.

"Hannah calls it progress," said Mrs. Guerrin. "I suppose it is."

Dayton looked with reverence at the person thus referred to as holding advanced opinions, and at that moment the dining-room door opened.

Preliminary to any movement in that direction, Mr. Guerrin hesitated and looked about him. "Where is Rachel?" he inquired.

"I'm coming, father," some one answered, and there entered with slight precipitation a slender, blooming girl. She had her hat in her hand, and a brown setter followed at her heels. Going up to Mr. Guerrin he took her head in his hands and kissed her, while the elder women glanced up with a flutter of the eyelids. She had their height, the same lack of self-consciousness, the same straightness of nose, the same contour of face, but in the different expression she gave them she seemed almost to make light of the family features. She carried with confidence the bowed head of her forefathers. She raised from time to time the ancestral eyebrows. She allowed a restless light to shine in the gray Desborough optics, and destroyed with a reckless smile their careful gravity.

Dayton bowed as he was presented, a bow of proper depth and deference, but nevertheless a bow of blind indifference,—the bow of one who expected nothing of the new acquaintance,—of one introduced to no new impressions. There was in his quiet glance no recognition of her fairness, and he immediately went on talking with her mother.

Halstead, also, in his turn, made a bow of proper depth and deference,—a quiet bow accompanied by a quiet glance; but by the time his eyes had fairly made their delicate observations, she was connected in his mind with the freshness of the spring, and the on-coming warmth of the summer.

"My daughter," Mr. Guerrin had stated, and "These are the gentlemen of whom I told you."

"You are to blow up our hills," said Rachel with her smile.

"If you wish," murmured Halstead, with such directness as struck three of them, at least, as of tremendous import.

Mr. Guerrin had, indeed, been somewhat surprised when he surveyed at his leisure the young fellow whom Dayton had brought with him. He was not what might be expected ; younger, lighter, easier, more picturesque ; the sort of a fellow to look for in a drawing-room, not in a railroad corps, roughing it in the mountains. He did not remember ever to have met any one like him, but he shook him by the hand and had no misgivings.

Not so the others. They looked at him closely, askance, questioningly, and when he murmured, "If you wish," they could almost have put their fingers in their ears, so loudly and with such far reverberations did it seem to ring.

"Who is this Mr. Halstead?" asked Miss Hannah later, coming into the sitting room with a basket piled high with underwear.

"That is not quite clear yet," answered Mr. Guerrin, turning, with his hands behind him, and facing the only tribunal of practical consequence to him. "He came with Dayton. Dayton is very reliable. He seems a clever sort of young man."

"He is too clever, too everything," she said, drawing to its distant end her thread of darning cotton.

"All the more reason why you ought to like him, Hannah," he returned, eagerly seizing the thought.

"Hannah may like him, and still not think he will do good here," began the elder Miss Desborough.

"There is Rachel," suggested Miss Hannah, delicately.

"Oh, it's Rachel, is it?" he cried, the light breaking in upon him. "I can make it right with Rachel. She'll treat him well."

The youth under discussion had in reality a good though slight figure, and a fine head, well set on his shoulders. One of his white teeth was broken; there were two vertical lines in the middle of his forehead, and he was slightly near-sighted; but those who knew him thought him enhanced by these as well as more serious defects. Wherever there was a flaw in him there also was an added charm. His faults were the most becoming faults of which youth could be guilty, and the man or the woman had yet to be found who would not forgive him his graceful trespasses. A commercial friend of his had once frowned upon him with impatience and an angry sense of wrong, when Halstead looked up with his disarming smile. "What-

ever fault you have to find with me," he said, "now is the opportunity."

"It is a very good opportunity," said his friend presently, as he turned away, "but I have no stock." It was always so when they came to designate his shortcomings.

Nothing, apparently, had ever gone deeply wrong with him ; or if there had,— and he was twenty-eight which made it probable,— he interposed so many interests between his present self and his memory of disaster, that he seemed to have escaped mischances ; there were, at least, no outward signs of that accumulation of disappointments which seems necessary to give the soul at twenty-eight the proper consistency.

His vitality was always aglow. His sensibilities were always abroad. When he walked out under the twinkling heavens he observed both the stars above and the cowslips below, and if the one were sometimes obscured, and if he sometimes knocked the head off the other, he whistled and went on. He was remarkable for always going on. Even when he stood momentarily in the attitude of a spectator, it was as a spectator who could easily seize anything he wanted, if his ardor came to the assistance of his indifferent wishes.

His mother, a stately and ambitious woman, had sent him to the Boston Institute of Technology, and then to the Central School of Arts and Manufactures in Paris, where he spent five years. Apart from his acquirements as a student, which, in truth, were not prodigious, she intended him to be something brilliant in

a social way. She also meant him to prosper in business, to be rich, to be talented, to be politic; and he intended some day to indulge these whims of his mother. His father, deceased, had been inclined toward prodigal living, spending much money in the greed of that inclination, and the son developed a taste for pleasure which as his father's son rendered him liable to suspicion. Once or twice he had fancied elegant women older than himself, and it was said that for so young a man he had made some extensive journeyings in pursuit of these superb objects of his interest,—beside other things indicative of great strength of fancy.

On the other hand, he considered dissipation a senseless pastime, and it must be admitted that he had a capacity for application and a degree of uprightness that might carry him through.

III.

SEVERAL days later Dayton and Halstead again found themselves together in the quarters now-grown familiar, Halstead having made himself acquainted with even the most distant views, and Dayton having more than once recruited his energy and lost sight of the hills in chairs which seemed kindly disposed to accommodate themselves to every peculiarity of the human back. They had been days of unusual exertion, and while each had kept flowing a small current of lighter thoughts, they had been deterred by certain unforeseen eccentricities in those currents from a free interchange of impressions.

Halstead on this occasion was seated by a table near the window, endeavoring to catch the last rays of light upon some sheets of card-board which he was systematically defacing, when Dayton came wandering in from the side piazza, with the look of one from whom the lethargy had recently been shaken. He prepared the lamp ready for lighting, arranged some news and other papers, placed advantageously for the light one of the comfortable and reverie-breeding receptacles for his person, and then as if these preparations for the evening were slightly in advance of the evening itself, or as if he were in no mood for immediate subsidence, paused on his way for a match and squared himself upon the rug.

"The young lady here is something unusual for this locality, is n't she?" he began as if it were the first time the subject had been mentioned. "Have you seen much of her?"

"You have looked at her, finally, have you?" said Halstead, adding some corrective touches to the wayward lines upon his paper.

"I have looked at her, yes, — perhaps not finally," returned Dayton.

Halstead glanced up, suspending his implement midway between his eye and card-board, and suppressing a whistle, not to express too rude a surprise. Then catching his comrade's uncommon and unbusiness-like air he bent to his work again, to hide his impudent insight.

"Have you talked with her much?" Dayton inquired.

"No, — scarcely at all in fact."

"I supposed you would know her well by this time. We have been here three days, man!"

"I don't. You've begun it!"

"Begin what?"

"Her acquaintance. If you make it, it opens that pasture to the rest of us, does n't it?"

Dayton laughed, a short, half-amused laugh. "It is full of greenness," he returned.

"I dare say."

"Not what you mean by greenness. I am no judge of that, — freshness, you know."

"I dare say," repeated Halstead.

"Come," said Dayton, "you would like her."

Halstead went on diligently with his unintelligible draft. "Well?" he said presently, without lifting his glance.

"Well what?" echoed Dayton.

"Go on if you are going to? Where did you see her?"

"Just now. We came down through the gorge over yonder. There is a road through. I heard there was a house up there we could get, and went up for a walk to look at it. It's a good mile."

"Too far," said Halstead.

"Rather far," assented Dayton, resuming his usual manner, "but it might do. It is in pretty good repair, only the windows broken. Four rooms. Good spring and fine view. You could lie outside and apostrophize the planets,—I believe you like that sort of thing. Rather breezy, but we won't object to breezes soon."

"Never mind the house," interrupted his charming listener dryly.

"Whoever lived there probably blew away," continued Dayton.

"The pretty, hectic girls went the rest of the way up," conjectured Halstead, "and the men went west. Go on with your story."

"That is all of it."

"What was she doing?"

"She seemed to be swinging her hat."

"She feels easier, apparently, in the company of her hat."

To this Dayton made no response. He glanced idly about the room. He was still in no hurry to proceed with his usual evening occupations.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Halstead, "what did she say?"

"She talked away. It is very pleasant out."

"What did *you* say then?—one is pretty sure to remember that."

"There was a foolish brook," answered Dayton, getting a match but not striking it, "and I wanted to help her across. I told her I had never known a woman yet who did not fall in when an opportunity presented itself. 'Fall in what?' she said."

"What did you say to that?"

"I told her, 'Whatever chasm there was.' She didn't let me help her."

"No wonder. She could n't very well after that, you know. Was she alone?"

"There were some ragamuffins with her. The Dan Drueys she called them,—it seems they live on the place. She introduced them as if they were a pair of grandes. They were driving some sheep, and we walked down through the gorge together. It could n't be helped."

Halstead rose abruptly with his hands full of pencils. "To think of you, my dear fellow," he cried with mocking incredulity, "playing the part of a rustic. I thought I knew you. What next? Where are your sheep, and what have you done with the shepherdess? It is beastly wet for driving sheep, eh?"

"What do you think of the house?" asked Dayton. He wondered if he had been a trifle ridiculous. He thought he might have been. Halstead's sense on such points was unerring.

"I confess I have n't thought of it at all," he replied. "I have n't had time. Your subsequent buccolic drove it out of my head. I imagined you had given it up, you have been so long about it."

"*I thought* you did n't care for it," Dayton rejoined.

"I? It's you!" said Halstead going back to his desk.

"The trouble with you," began Dayton after a time, as if their thoughts in the dark pursued the same channel, "is that you don't know how to make an acquaintance in the ordinary sense. It is one of the few things that you do with excessive thoroughness; the rest of us are satisfied to be tolerably superficial in that line! If you are entertaining any such purpose don't say I began it. There are some of your lighter pursuits that I am proud to inaugurate, you know; but when it comes to a bit of skilled labor, like the making of an acquaintance, on which you exercise your peculiar gifts, you need n't point back at me. It is more than I bargained for."

"You are too modest," said Halstead.

"Well, your conscience is clear," retorted the elder.

"You are right. I'm not modest, I admit," cried Halstead, and as he spoke he had a certain pleasant sense of inextinguishable brightness. To be an easy fellow, a clever fellow, a fellow who kept his lights

well burning, seemed to him too charming a destiny to be muffled in modesty.

"When I think of some of your acquaintances," began Dayton again, a little uncomfortably —

"Don't think of them if it makes you uneasy, — what's the use?" interrupted his frank assistant. And to all appearances Dayton concluded to accept this piece of cheerful advice.

He went on smoking, and there was a second long interval of silence, till, completing a portion of his drawing, Halstead held it out and carefully surveyed it at arm's length.

"I suspect," he said slowly, — and for a moment Dayton thought he was reading from the card-board, — "I suspect that the Desborough economy has blossomed into an extravagance. Their sobriety has fermented. Their grays have grown rosy. Their tame ness is running a little wild. There is some life and color in the last member of the family. It is amusing to see her apprehensive elders look at her; have you noticed? They are afraid she will ruffle their profound serenity. She whispers in the ears of the sleepers! You are a sleeper; you would better look out; she might begin talking to you! I say it is n't much she wants of us, is it?" he went on, adding a line here and there to his work. "We did not come to seek her or to be entertained by her, and she scorns to take advantage of the accident that brought us to her house for lesser purposes. Perhaps she takes us for her father's clerks!"

It was Dayton's turn now to whistle but he, too, forbore.

"I thought you had taken her measurement," he said, and then he composed himself among his papers, running his unarrested eyes up and down the columns.

The chances of conversation were at an end, and after a time Halstead tipped back in his chair, and with his hands clasped behind his neck looked out at the gloaming. It was the hour when, for eighteen years, he had turned from his multifarious occupations to his multifarious pleasures, and the remission of the latter filled him with a burdensome impatience at the former. He looked out idly, leisurely at first, then frowningly, restlessly. The white gate-way raised its arms aloft and beckoned him in the gloom. The deserted road urged him away. A gap in the horizon offered him an easy transit. But these familiar avenues would but trick him into a deeper dullness. There were no tickets taken at the gate-way, no flights of steps, no gas-jets, no voices awaited him at the end of the high-road, and no novelty of adventure in the mountains; and turning away from the raw country scene with its raw depressions he sauntered out into the main hall of the house. Through the open door of the sitting-room came the smooth sound of desultory music; and catching the air on his Eolian spirit he presented himself at the threshold, and was bidden to enter by Miss Hannah herself.

Mrs. Guerrin was there still engaged with her soft blue wools; Mr. Guerrin was deep in the wisdom of

the "Springfield Republican," the great staple of his reading; Miss Desborough was going through an epistolary struggle with her desk upon her lap, and Rachel was seated at the piano, on which much abused, domestic instrument she was playing, as to herself, some very undomestic arias.

It was to Miss Hannah that our young gentleman first addressed himself in lively pantomime. Indeed, from the very beginning and with wisdom greater than he knew he had addressed himself largely and effectively in that direction, and it was not until her approbation seemed the chief object of his visit that he permitted himself to go on to the piano.

Rachel continued her uninterrupted measures for some moments, while Halstead stood near, listening perhaps, perhaps merely waiting. Presently and almost imperceptibly her fingers faltered, and the consistent melody seemed to scatter, to lose itself in chords and disconnected notes; then, from some disturbing cause, it discomposed into the silence that originally held it, and she looked up at him over the score.

"Are you a musician?" she asked.

"It is rather a matter of by-gones," he replied, readjusting himself in an attitude of fresh interest. "I played the violin at one time in a college band; and I was once guilty of owning a guitar."

"There is a guitar somewhere about the house," said Rachel.

"You should not tell me that as an isolated fact," he rejoined. "You should add that you would resur-

rect it, and that we would throw open the windows and have a summer garden. There is an immense amount of music, among other things, in a summer garden."

"Is there? I was never in one."

"Whatever one wants up here one must make, even to an orchestra," he declared. "To-day I wanted a rope, and we twisted it of straw; one can get most anything if one twists up the straws."

"I don't know about that," said Rachel, rising. But her doubt did not extend to the confident and smiling young man who affirmed it, and compared with whose knowledge her own hearsay seemed vapid and valueless.

There was no particular reason why she should have risen. It was an unreasonable impulse of which she had no warning. It was the first time this strange, young foreign native had sought and addressed her, yet at the first available moment some struggling motive in her sought to put an end to it. She wondered greatly about him, and on some of her recent animated strolls she had speculated upon that larger life which he so ably epitomized. She expected to know him well before the summer was over, but was conscious of satisfaction in its delay, its slow beginning. He looked at her with a certain bright deliberateness which had in it no element of impertinence, yet in the light of this experienced gaze she seemed singularly ignorant and elementary; and when he spoke to her she felt that she could only help him in short and desultory sentences, since the smallness of her range when

compared with his extensive familiarity, must make wide silences between them. Perhaps it was in anticipation of some such coming silence that she so suddenly broke off their brief dialogue, and rising, hesitated.

"How is the road, Halstead?" asked Mr. Guerrin, hearing the stir from behind the "Republican." And Halstead advancing, explained to him some of their engineering difficulties; while Rachel going over to the windows dropped the damask curtains as if the spreading of their crimson arabesques had been the duty which she found it impossible longer to postpone.

"It's heavy work, heavy work, no doubt about that," said Mr. Guerrin shortly, rubbing a thin hand over his sharp knee, "but there is nothing like work for a young man."

"I suppose not," answered the young man lightly. "It is what they all tell us. We have to come to it in self-defense. Life soon ceases to give us satisfaction gratuitously."

Rachel drew near again. Epigrams upon life had a great attraction for her. She would have liked herself to be able to make them. Whenever she heard one, which was not often, her imagination took it up and she tried to conceive the vivid and varied existence condensed into that compact and portable form. She had never seen any one who seemed himself such an epigram as young Halstead,—who had observed everything, and who had so well digested human-kind. If

the princes of the "Arabian Nights" had been mentioned, she would have expected him to twist his moustache and say, "Ah, yes, I know them; once when in Arabia" — Perhaps it was the Paris in him. She had heard he had been in Paris. Parisians knew everything; smiled at everything.

Miss Hannah also raised her regular and inflexible features. To her this light generalizing seemed to imply years of anterior recreancy. It was as if he had poked his nose in many crooked alleys and then coming out upon the highway, sniffed the air, exclaiming, "How sweet it smells."

"It is n't to this life that one must look for satisfaction," she said, closing her lips upon the sentence as if to suppress others that would follow in case of contradiction.

"True, madam," said Halstead, forestalling them with a little bow.

"When I was in the senate," said Mr. Guerrin, "every other man I met seemed to be a shirker. They were all after soft places — no work and good pay."

"You have been in the senate, then, sir?"

"For a term only. From the manufacturing district. I took my family with me to Boston, but my wife did not like it. She missed her sisters, and she could n't bear the people slipping about the hotels. She thought they seemed guilty. I rather liked it myself, but after all it did n't pay. Whatever you do, sir, never go into politics. Better loaf, and be done with it. It's cheaper and more certain."

"Oh, I've tried that!" said Halstead, with what seemed to Miss Hannah to be the beginning of endless confession. "I might, perhaps, be at it yet if it were not for Dayton. He took me by the shoulders and set me to work, without even saying 'By your leave.' I had begun to yawn when he came along. He was right; he is always right. I was a great idler. He thinks a great deal of making money, Dayton does. I don't know why. He don't care for it, much less for what he can get with it. It's habit with him. He is devoted to his profession, and it seems to enable him to dispense with other pastimes. You see it is n't merely that he desires a fortune; he desires to make it by high methods. He stubbornly does his best,—that's habit, too!"

"It is a good one to fall into," remarked Miss Hannah.

"I don't see how he comes by it," said Mrs. Guerrin. "He has led a very irregular life. He told me himself he was from South America. It seems to me, and I am sure it must seem so to you, too, Hannah, that good habits don't come with much moving about,—they are like moss,—they don't grow on rolling stones."

"Oh, he is no rolling stone," cried Halstead. "He has really been about very little. With the exception of a few years in California, he has lived all his life right around here, between the Atlantic and the Mississippi. Besides, wherever he goes he has the same general purpose. When he moves off with his valise

in his hand, he is all there ; purpose, energy, outfit, his darling, which is his profession,— everything. He leaves nothing. It is like the motion of the earth ; everything moves with him, so he feels no motion at all. He is no rolling stone ! ”

“ I don’t accuse him,” said Mrs. Guerrin, bewildered at the likeness between her accusation, if she had made one, and its defense. “ We all think highly of him,— ask Hannah, ask Mr. Guerrin. We think very highly of him, indeed,— only it is strange that with his drawbacks he is what he is. He ” —

Halstead, who had remained standing, happened to look down at his boots, and his averted attention seemed to relieve her from words that were suggested and vocalized only through his appealing amiability, and she stopped, paralyzed by the diminutive and door-yard view that she was asked to take of a large part of the Western Continent.

“ I believe it was in California that he made his reputation,” said Mr. Guerrin, bringing the conversation back to a safe basis. “ He made a good one.”

“ Without a blotch,” assented Halstead, “ or rather without a botch.”

Again he looked at Rachel with his bright deliberate gaze.

“ So perfect as that ? ” she said, thinking something was expected of her.

“ Oh, it will do for me to find him perfect,” he answered. “ It becomes me. Men generally approve him whether they like him or not, but they don’t ex

pect to foist their unqualified approbation upon those from whom he himself don't ask or deserve it. He is n't a woman-hater, nor even a woman shunner. He is a woman ignorer. It would n't be fair with such a defect as that to ask you to think him perfect, too. My sister gets more responses from him than any one I know. She is older than I, and married, and she talks to him upon some widely impersonal subject, like the copper mines of Michigan, or the cockatoos of the Molucca Islands. Copper mines are safe; cockatoos are safe. Nothing personal about that. He has been known to go up there with me to dinner when we were in Boston."

"You are friends, then, as well as business associates?" conjectured Mr. Guerrin.

"Friends first and foremost. I am under obligations to him. Perhaps I can repay him some day, but I doubt it. He is obstinate; he goes his own way, and you can't do much for him. I would like to catch him some time under stress for help, and clap a favor on him before he knew it. You think you are doing something for him, and the first thing you know you are over head and ears in his debt; and he does n't seem to intend it either. Just now, sir, he permits himself to be under obligations to you, but in the end you can't tell where you 'll be."

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Guerrin with more positiveness than he generally ventured upon. "I am under obligations to him now and all the time, — with long arrears of interest. Don't let me hear any more

about that. All you have to do is to make yourselves comfortable if you can."

"The wing," began his wife tentatively, "is cold in winter, but it is generally considered pleasant in summer."

"Delightful," assented Halstead.

"Then use it," said Miss Hannah, with the brevity of one who assumed an almost tragic responsibility.

Rachel, under the lamp-light, continued her gentle occupation, paying no further attention to the conversation or to the novel central figure, who from his position on the rug, which seemed to serve him as a sort of stage, turned first to one and then to another of her serious elders. He was not without a certain sense of dramatic effect upon his audience, and that that effect was not wholly unfavorable he felt assured from Miss Hannah's dictum; but what it might be upon the passive embroiderer who was rather withdrawn from the circle, he had scant means of knowing. "Never," he said to himself as he went to his room, "was there a girl so amply fathered and mothered, particularly mothered. Three of them,—heavens!"

IV.

IT was the first Sunday after their arrival in Beau-deck and Halstead found the time rather heavy on his hands. He spent the morning as he spent his evenings, bending over the table on which lay the symbols of his art; and from this position he saw the remnant of the historic Desboroughs go down the long walk to the sound of bells, from the economy of whose resonance he argued a corresponding frugality in the feast to which they gave summons. He put his elbows on the table and his pencil behind his ear, and presently there floated to him on the hopeful morning air a despairing psalm, to which incongruous entertainment he listened with amused benevolence. It seemed to him that he had never since his birth been caught in such profound stillness as followed the singing of that psalm. He even felt a difficulty in breathing it, and resorted to drubbing as a precaution against asphyxia.

But it was in the afternoon that the length as well as the depth of the stillness most impressed him. He went out upon the piazza and watched for a while the holy sun in its slow progression from the zenith to the mountain-tops, till blinded by that pastime he went within and turned over some old volumes that crowded the book-shelves in his room. Selecting one of the lightest, he finally composed himself for literary im-

provement, but, as was often the case with him, his composure proved greater than his mental activity. While the subject of the sketch was still a boy in London, Halstead's mind wandered, and when he came to, as he expressed it, the obscure infant had grown to eminent maturity. How he did it Nathan never knew. He closed the book, and picked up his hat.

"This won't do," he said to Dayton as he passed him on the piazza; "we must go down to Boston another Sunday."

"What's the matter?" answered Dayton; "I confess I don't see the attractions of that famous metropolis."

"Do as you please," rejoined the other, "I can't stand a vacuum like this."

"Like what?" said Dayton; but Halstead did not stop to make himself intelligible to such perverse stolidity.

Going down the steps, he followed the semicircular road a short distance, looking down at himself as if his interest were in the pleasing exercise of his legs; then he swung himself across the lawn; then turned at right angles and went down toward the garden, gradually losing his vivacious restlessness in a leisurely, Sunday inquisitiveness. He had never been down in the garden, and pausing midway among the herbs, he broke off a tansy leaf and looked back at the house. There was no one at any of the windows, no one on any of the porches. It stood there trustful and vacant; and feeling himself alone on unexplored territory, he

went on down the path walking with his hands behind him as men will on Sunday. Behind the garden, which was devoted to domestic and floral purposes, was an orchard, to which he admitted himself through a hingeless gate, and again looked about him.

A number of lots had evidently been sold off the place where it bordered on the village street, but it extended back of these for a long, lean distance down the river. In the angle thus formed and behind the town lots was a low stone embankment, whose singular position attracted his loose-flying curiosity, and strolling in that direction he came upon an old and populous graveyard, long since disused and overgrown with vines and brambles. It was drearily old. Time there was over and eternity had set in. The grave-stones had ceased to be painstaking and elegant, and had fallen into shiftless attitudes. The very ghosts were taking their ease, and the grief, the anguish, the joy, the sense which afflict mankind seemed distilled into mellow humor and overhanging sunshine. Its manifest disuse, its sunny neglect, its evident desire to bury its own remains under the sods and creepers; its tottering monuments once upright and firm as the low-lying Christians; its baby-stones sunken like mumble-the-pegs,—all gave the impression that death itself was so old and so obsolete as to have lost its sting. Halstead hailed it as the secret spot from which emanated the stillness and solemnity which flooded the valley, and reviewed its tangles with the confidence of assured immortality. He was fashioned according to the latest pattern of life,

and he smiled at the quaintness of death. He seemed to himself to be talking aloud, so clearly did his thoughts flow in that otherwise thoughtless silence.

One hand was on the branch of a crab-apple tree, and he was about to mount to the higher level of the ancient dead, when a daub of invisible blue such as nature never paints upon her grave-yard walls, struck across his eye. Pushing aside the brambles he discovered that the foreign coloring was the dress of Miss Rachel Desborough Guerrin. She was seated upon a monument of slate that had fallen face downward upon the wall. Her back was turned toward him, and her sophisticated shoes projected a few inches into the spaces of the orchard. Observing this, the trespasser behind her suddenly turned and went strolling off down the river, wondering as he came within range of her vision if her clear-sighted eyes were looking at him over the top of her magazine. He was sure they were, and also sure of a certain picturesqueness in his appearance as he followed a meandering path by the water's edge.

But the channel of his inquisitiveness was changed, and coming after a time to some marshy ground he retraced his steps, and without any deliberate intention of so doing turned again to the wall near the effective smattering of blue.

"I supposed," he said, as he lifted his hat, "that you had gone to some afternoon service. I heard more bells. It seems I was mistaken."

"Yes," assented Miss Guerrin, smiling sufficiently to lead him to make a further remark.

"I congratulate you upon your absence," he went on, still holding his hat, and pausing as if for a mere momentary discontinuance of his strolling.

"It was the sunshine," explained Rachel, expecting him to go.

"The true religion is in it," he waited to say.

"Oh, it was n't that," she answered; "I did n't analyze it to better my excuse."

"I not only congratulate you," pursued Halstead, "I congratulate myself too. You look so harmonious, you make one ashamed of one's distempers."

"Did you have a distemper?"

"Yes."

"You found it dull," suggested Miss Guerrin.

"Very," he replied, putting on his hat.

"You will get used to it," she declared.

"I hope not."

"You should rather hope you would. We are all used to it."

"Should I?" he inquired, coming forward and leaning against the wall.

"Then it would n't seem dull any more."

"What would prevent?"

"You would begin to hear the chickens, for one thing," she answered with an expression which puzzled him. "They make it very lively."

"Happy day!" exclaimed Halstead, half suspecting her of wit.

"They would take the place in your ears of whistles and omnibuses and the sounds of the streets," she went

on. "It is really very noisy here. When the crickets and frogs begin, you can scarcely hear yourself think."

"What do you do when it is the liveliest?"

"Oh, I am a part of it," she answered,—"of the buzzing and droning and croaking."

"And blooming," he added, looking straight ahead of him at the many mounds of many lengths.

She made no reply, apparently losing him altogether in the sweep of the river, and he wished he had not been so ready with his shallow compliment. He also thought that if she too had lived within the sound of the streets and had said, "Oh, I 'm a part of it,— of the bowing and smiling and acting," she could not have done it with more charming grace.

"I imagine," he began again, "that it was n't altogether because of the sunshine, that you happened to be here. Is n't it the least bit prosy yonder in your hallowed rendezvous? The whole congregation sing alto, eh? Down here they don't. You like this better."

"Are we a congregation?" she inquired.

"You and I and Deacon Mayflower, Concurrence Primrose, and all the rest," he replied, as if reading the names from the stones about them. "I did n't know there were any grave-yards in America.. I thought they were all in Europe."

"I am a very good friend of all those people in there," she said, indicating the abode of the obsolete.

"Are you? Well, their singing could never offend any one."

"They are my intimates," pursued the girl, keeping her eyes upon the mounds. "There is Hannah Fletcher, who has been only nineteen since seventeen hundred and eleven."

"Have you learned the art of remaining nineteen for that length of time?"

"I have missed my opportunity for that," she declared.

"Ah!" observed Halstead.

"I am twenty-two. Is it proper to tell how old one is?"

"If one is only twenty-two. We make distinctions."

"We?" she repeated.

"We who do what is proper," answered the young man.

"We think we do what is proper, too," said Rachel, "but I fear our rules are different. We tell how old we are till it gets to be terrible."

"You are a terrible family," returned Halstead. "You have no respect for vanity. You make no allowance for youth. You endeavor to be always the same wise age. You are good. We are proper. There is a difference."

"I wonder if that is true," said Rachel.

"I am surprised that you should even wish to remain nineteen," he continued. "If you would avoid the twenties after the manner of your quiet friend yonder, I am afraid you don't appreciate your advantages. Perhaps you are not getting the worth of your time."

"I did n't say that I wished it," replied the girl with some reserve.

"Did you never think you would like to meet some one who was absolutely living?" he pursued. "Would one of the present century be distasteful to you?"

"To what century do you suppose I belong?"

"I have no right to suppose anything about you," said Halstead, raising his discriminating, humid eyes from the boots, with whose type he had long been acquainted, to the face with whose type he acknowledged himself a stranger. "I have been trying for days to keep my suppositions away from you. My ignorance of you is profound."

But Rachel did not seem inclined further to enlighten him.

"Why did you say," she asked presently, "that you hoped you would n't get used to it,—to the dullness?"

"I thought that implied accepting it with resignation,—partaking of it, in short," he answered. "I could n't do that without a struggle, you know. I should look about me. I should adopt some means,—do something,—enjoy something. One only needs to be a little ingenious. You see I did n't endure it long as it was. I came here. You must n't fear though that I am always going to call upon you for relief."

"You would be too ingenious for that," she replied. "You would know that always would be too often for success."

Halstead looked at her with astonishment which

was, perhaps, slightly patronizing. He thought her remark exceeding pertinent, and wondered if she knew how pertinent, or if it were one of the truths such as fall from the mouths of babes and sucklings.

"I don't know how to take that," he said. "I should n't wonder if you were clever."

"Oh, yes you would," protested Rachel, "you would say to yourself, That can't be."

"Upon my word, I would n't,—not now. I am convinced. I suspect you have inherited the brightness extinguished below," and he nodded again toward the populous inclosure.

"I wish I had," said the girl.

"What would you do with it?"

"I would shine," she answered.

"Before men?" added Halstead, half inquiringly, half affirmatively.

Her idea, however, had not the definiteness he gave it, and not knowing whether to accept or repel a suggestion capable of such varied import, she said nothing. He thought he had never seen a young woman capable of such sudden and complete silences. She did not even seem to be trying to say anything. Her thoughts, he would have said, were going on unembarrassed, without help or hindrance from without, and about those thoughts he was still curious.

"Are you going to let me remain in my ignorance?" he inquired, "or are you going to tell me what your life has been like?"

"Like nothing with which you are familiar," she replied.

"I am familiar with several varieties of life," he persisted. "Perhaps I could be made to understand."

"I don't doubt that," Rachel declared. She looked down at his light mustache and at the cameo ring on his finger, and again her imagination went off into the spaces through which the smiling person before her had carelessly come. She peopled them with charming figures, all rapidly gliding about. With exquisite women nodding their acquiescent heads, with ambitious, quick-stepping men, with beggars, with drivers, — they were all drivers — with buyers and sellers, with loafers, with passengers, and in the motley assemblage her interest made no marked distinctions.

"You have always lived here?" asked Halstead, as if to make the contrast greater.

"For generations."

He would have liked next to ask her where she got her dresses and who sent her her hats, which becoming articles seemed to have no possible connection with Beaudeck; but he contented himself with mute speculation upon those important points.

"Except when I was away at school," she added shortly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "that is it. Were you away long?"

"The difference was not so great as you may suppose. It was very much like this,— more so if anything. The house was larger. It was farther in the country. From the top of the hill you could see only hills. It was the country, — everywhere the country.

"There was even a grave-yard across the road." Rachel smiled. She seemed to be talking of herself in the half-humorous spirit of a third person, and he felt that he was being taken into her inner confidence. There was an emptiness there which made him laugh. She laughed too. She did n't know why. They seemed to be putting their heads together over the very simple record of a very simple person.

"I visited once in Indiana," she went on, "and once in Iowa."

"My poor child!" he interrupted.

"That was when I was very small," she continued, taking no notice of his pity. "I was in Boston, too, one winter, but we knew scarcely any one. When I walked about among the shops I laughed to think how green I was. It was all I could do to keep the proper colors on the surface."

"There is no doubt about the propriety of the colors on the surface," said Halstead, — "art or nature,— in their perfection the resemblance is very close." And again he looked away to give his speech a greater indirection.

All the same it seemed to have the effect of checking Rachel's light confession, and there was another pause.

"I beg your pardon," said Halstead shortly. "I won't do that again. I meant it, but it offends perhaps the—the greenness underneath. If you were used to it you would n't mind."

"Then what is the use of getting used to it?" she inquired.

" You require a man to be more than honest," he returned. " I confess my standard has been much lower. I have n't always been even that. With you I 'll go farther. I 'll be punctilious."

The afternoon sun struck athwart the crowded stones and filled the sunken graves with shadows. It also struck athwart the river, the garden, and the lithe figure of Miss Guerrin, and Halstead with his arms folded across the top of the wall, took into his now appeased consciousness the various charming features on which the sunshine slanted. He did not know when he had been contented with so little. He was not even smoking nor thinking of smoking. From somewhere on the hills came the cries of sheep, and not a moment of silence intervened between the successive bleats now near and now far. The tender leaves of grass were very green. A little breeze came along and rustled the birches. A bumble-bee buzzed out of a tulip. A plover whistled down among the water-grasses.

" Do you know," he began, " I like it here immensely. There is a perpetual lullaby crooning through these valleys. The mountains for one's friends; the summer for one's sweetheart, — it is delightful."

Rachel began to laugh. " To be sure," he added catching at her meaning, " it is n't an hour since I thought it tame, but that does n't prevent my liking it now. To decry a thing one moment and like it the next is nothing unusual; beside it has ceased to be tame."

" I like it too," said Rachel, " except sometimes."

"And why not sometimes?"

"We seem so,—so unnecessary, you know."

"That shows that you are self-seeking; that you have feeling; that you would like to be appreciated. I would never have accused you of that. You will have to resort to the living. There is nothing, to my notion, like the voice that says Come on, my friend."

"Come," said Rachel rising, "we must go back."

"Do you mean to say it then?"

"Say what, sir?"

"Come on, my friend."

"I had not thought of it."

"I would like to insist upon the formula."

"I would never think," she said, "of taking the lead like that, and calling back to you."

"Then, with your permission, I'll do it myself," and he held up his hands to lift her from the wall.

Halstead found Dayton just where he left him, and on coming out of the inner room where he had been washing the tansy off his hands (he was very particular about his hands), he recounted in part his afternoon experience. He was in a royal good humor, and although his royal good humors never betrayed themselves aggressively, Dayton generally enjoyed his society best when his spirits were low. At their highest, he felt like an alien, at their level he felt cheered, entertained, but at their lowest, which was after all but a slight recognition of the more serious thoughts with which spirits are freighted, he felt drawn toward him with a friendship which was perhaps the strongest

attachment of his detached life. "God never made but one Nathan Halstead," he once exclaimed, in an ebullition of sentiment. To which Nathan, when his sister repeated it, responded "No wonder He quit."

On this present occasion, his humor was so good as to seem almost fantastic to the sober mind of his friend. "Well," he began, "I let down the bars of that pasture this afternoon, and went in, — a good ways in. The pasture you described as Miss Guerrin's acquaintance," he added, seeing the blankness upon Dayton's face. "It is a delightfully rural spot, — no worn places, no hollows, no swamps. You get in and you are in no hurry to get out again. Something detains you. You have a fresh, leisurely feeling. You feel like a boy up the creek on a Saturday. She is more simple than I supposed, — more so than you would think from her make-up, particularly her shoes. I am bound to believe from the style of her shoes, that there is a bit of the boulevard in her intentions. She knows nobody. She loves the weather. She listens to the chickens, the frogs, and the crickets. But back of it all I am bound to believe she quietly craves our monstrous amusements. She looks like it. She smiles like it. Her profile alone would make it impossible for her to be happy in obscurity. When she projects it on the vision of a feeble man like me, he is afraid. I think she must have bent her full face upon you the day you drove the sheep; if I remember rightly you were not intimidated. I talked to her for an hour, and, unlike you, I remember what she said. She said

she, was twenty-two. She said she had been away at school. She said she would like to shine. She had on a hat that came over her eyes, and a blue flannel dress."

"You should tell all that to her mother," said Dayton, without looking up.

"Or to her aunts. There is always a perspective of aunts!" agreed Halstead.

"But whatever you do," the young fellow rambled on in his original tone, "you mustn't bow and pay her compliments. She does n't know what to do with pretty speeches like most of her sisters. I tried it, naturally enough, and she rejected them with silence. I tell you that you may avoid a like profanity."

"You needn't put your remarks in the form of advice, unless you mean to follow it yourself," interpolated Dayton.

"You said you had looked at her, but perhaps not finally," returned his comrade.

"Nonsense!" said Dayton, who was made strangely uncomfortable by this pleasant recital. He remembered sitting once near a shrill clarionet, when he felt the same way. "If it is profanity to discuss her personal qualities in talking with her, had n't we better drop her?"

That very same evening, Halstead again saw her upon the front piazza, where she had been walking up and down.

"You want to give a greater value to my time," she said to him when he asked permission to join her.

"And to mine," he answered. "I am one of those

gregarious mortals to whom solitude means time wasted. You live in New England, you ought to hate waste of any sort."

"I ought to hate it for myself, but to encourage it in my neighbors."

"Do you mean to say, then, that solitude on my part would be to your advantage?"

"If I did I could not say it so well as that."

"But did you?"

"What I really think," she said, slackening her pace and putting her hands upon her elbows, "is that it would be much to my advantage that you should not be solitary. I would like to know the things that you do."

"No you would n't," he answered. "I know some things that I would rather not know myself, — some tolerably burdensome things. I am coming to you to revive my ignorance. I have n't been so ignorant in ten years as I was this afternoon."

"Ignorance is n't so — so communicable," she rejoined, pausing at the end of the piazza.

"Yes it is," he gently insisted, raising one arm against a pillar, "it is a feeling, — a young, humble sort of feeling."

Rachel raised her glance to his face and found him slightly smiling, rather with his eyes than with his mouth. She wondered why it was that in their conversation they both so constantly smiled. "It is n't that with me," she replied; "it is a greedy, hungry feeling. I want to feed it."

"Don't do it," he said.

"Why not?"

"Don't do it," he repeated.

"One would not expect you to feel humble and to like it," said Rachel at length.

"Neither would one expect you to be rapacious," he retorted.

"I am not,—not always."

"Nor am I humble always,—only when the sun shines on grave-yard walls. Then I would like to be a Puritan,—a Puritan peasant."

"And when it goes down behind the hills," returned Rachel with a wish born upon the instant, "I would like to be a woman of the world."

"There are many different species of that beautiful being," answered Halstead.

"Of course I would like to be the finest."

"It is down now," he cried, his affinity for women of the world stealing over him. He looked through the warm dusk at the bright horizon, and back again to the face turned toward him with parted lips; then gathering a handful of the summer ether he blew it back toward the golden west with a careless, contemplative air. "The world, if you had it," he said, "might not please you more than so much atmosphere."

"Oh, I have breathed miles upon miles of the atmosphere," said Miss Rachel Guerrin. "I know the pleasure of that!"

"And I have been over miles upon miles of the

nether territory, and know the pleasure of that. That is why I envy you."

"You envy me for amusement," she answered.
"That is where you show your ingenuity again."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the young man,
thinking how efficacious in this case his ingenuity was.

"You make me feel blank, — unfurnished," the girl went on, surprised at her own communicativeness. "I told you I was twenty-two, but on review I am only eleven. I wish that a great deal had happened to me, and that I had seen and known a great many people and places, but I have n't. You see I have thought of myself a great deal. Mine is n't much of an ambition, of course," she added; "but it seems to me that if one is too comfortable to have an occupation which one follows for dear life's sake, the next best thing is to be very, very gay in a social way, — to know a great many people and places as you do."

"Don't put it in that way," said Halstead. "There are only two classes of persons that it is worth while to be. One is the women whom men conspire to lift above all 'occupation for dear life's sake'; as you say; and the other the men with the ability to keep them here."

"I wonder if that is true," said Rachel.

"Just as you like," answered Halstead. "It is a matter of opinion. I give you mine. Meanwhile," he continued, "before you attain the full dimensions of the resplendent, but perturbed being you desire to be, I would like to learn the secret of your present serenity."

"For that you should go to aunt Hannah," she advised.

He hesitated a moment, then laughed rather to himself. "I believe I should," he declared. "I'll go now."

He went down the steps, and ascending the piazza of the wing, walked its length, then retraced his steps Dayton was within and he tapped upon the window.

"I believe," he said, "that I'll go up and look at that house. Which way is it?"

"All right," answered Dayton, "I'll go with you." And the two friends started up the road together.

There was nothing said on the way about the object of their journey, and it might have been supposed during the first quarter of an hour that they were a couple of Turks in the mountains of Roumania with such close interest did their conversation keep to the war then in progress between the Sultan and the Emperor of all the Russias. From this it branched off to the management of the Suez Canal; thence, using M. de Lesseps as a conjunction, to the Grand Central Asiatic Railway Society and the projected road between Orenburg and Peshawur by way of Samarkand. Halstead, slipping his arm in that of his chief with a virtuous sense of carrying out a well-advised resolution, told some anecdotes of the oil-wells on the Caspian Sea; which Dayton followed with some peculiarities of the river Oxus; and when they came to the object of their expedition they were still rambling over the Asiatic steppes. Through the dilapidated gate of their pro-

posed residence they reentered once more the land of the free and the home of the brave, and Halstead boldly said he thought they might remove their effects at once — unless it was altogether too far from the village, — and did he, Dayton, suppose it would be possible to find a cook.

Dayton produced a key, and they went through the rooms of the lower floor, making an immense noise through the dark recesses.

Halstead would have walked with a lighter tread, and have spoken with a less tremendous voice, but his companion was no such respecter of the musty silence. He opened the door of the stair-way and shouted through the reverberating passage that it was not worth while to go into the attic, that the rooms below were more than enough.

"It would be a great lark," echoed Nathan with an irrepressible chill. And then lighting their cigars they trudged back through the gorge.

When they were again in their room with the curtains drawn, Halstead put his hands behind him and looked around, as in a gallery, at the antiquities on the wall. "If we *do* stay," he finally observed, "we must send the Cesnola Collection to our hostess in the fall."

V.

EARLY each morning Dayton and Halstead went off together to their bridges and tunnels, returning only at night, or, as was frequently the case, not returning for several days. There was some exceedingly heavy work to be done in the vicinity of Beaudeck which bid fair to detain them in that section for months to come.

The village itself, with its gangs of laborers, began to look more like a mining station in Arizona, than a respectable New England town; but the sight of the men as they tramped in ragged procession, was beautiful in the eyes of the hopeful townsmen. Great wagons, loaded with dynamite, passed mysteriously through the streets in the dead of night, and at intervals during the day, loud explosions ripped through the aged silence of the valley. Everywhere there was progress and bustle.

At the Desborough place as elsewhere, a new and livelier atmosphere was created, and a breeze fresh from Boston seemed to be blowing through the house. Rachel no longer carried a sense of loneliness around with her, and never once felt that her youth was going to waste. Although learning nothing new of her own knowledge, she felt that something was slowly happening, — something with great power to awaken and to agitate. She no longer even cared to get beyond her

usual circumference ; and instead of going out into the great unknown, she would close the valley at both ends, lest some of its charm should ooze away.

During this time, she heard a great deal of worldly talk, which kept a commotion in her veins,—the sort of commotion it seemed which went on in city thoroughfares. When she went out upon the piazza, or upon the lawn after tea, her presence seemed to conjure another presence into the same vicinage ; and if she stooped to look at a butterfly, or a lady-bird, she was sure not to remain alone in her brief admiration of those fly-away objects ; even when she called her dog he never came unaccompanied. She heard Von Bülow compared with Liszt. She heard of the Grand Opera in Paris, and the people who walked in the foyer. She heard of George Sand and Alfred de Musset. She heard of a steerage passenger who, going ashore at the last moment for some forgotten bundle of rags, was left by the departing ship, which carried her seven little paddies to an unknown land. She heard of a boot-blacker whose name was Alexander Von Humboldt ; and she heard of certain roulette tables. “I only had ten dollars in the pool,” Halstead said to her with a grimace, “and if I had won I would have had a thousand. I call that doing pretty well for me. It is as near as I ever came to a fine speculation.”

He told good and bad in the same tone, and with a strange indifference to their boundary lines, as drawn in Beaudeck ; and Rachel listened with wide eyes and

unappeased appetite. Now and then there were deep rifts in the smiling surface of his meaning over which she lightly skipped without looking down ; and now , and then there were subtle barbs which seemed to aim at susceptibilities in her nature that had hitherto been hidden in the dark.

“ There is n’t much of me to know,” she said to him one day, “ but there is a great deal to experiment upon. I believe what you like best in me is the visible effect of your own wit.”

“ Never mind,” he said, “ what I like best in you. I hesitate to inquire. You are a very misleading person. By nature you are one thing ; by education another. You should forego one or the other, and stand out clearly for what you are. You carry a watering-pot and a trowel, but I suspect you of the deepest arts. While you pretend to care immensely to hear of the outside world, you and your garden together are obscuring what fragmentary memories I have. Is it these fragrant stuffs, these infernal herbs, whose roots you dig about ? I am losing both mind and ambition. All I ask is to vegetate in your garden. The other day, down at the junction, there came up to me with outstretched hand a sleek fellow, with an eye-glass, and hair brushed back like one of Germany’s transcendental sons. I felt like saying, ‘ Who are you ? ’ Yet we were intimate in January. I am forgetting,—I don’t even remember what I am forgetting. Those professions of yours are all humbug. You don’t care a marigold for Paris. You shrug your shoulders

at Boston. What you want is a disciple who finds reflections in hollyhocks, and takes pleasure in pastures! You want me to eat your poppies."

"I want nothing of the kind," quickly protested Rachel. "Vegetate if you like, but don't accuse me of arts that I have not, and would not have. I hate arts."

"Now you speak like the holder of the watering-pot," cried Halstead. "All women have arts."

"They don't willfully use them," she answered warmly.

"That might come from the mouth of the watering-pot itself. I think they do. You, for instance, with yours, might do me good," he added gently. "The countryman you create is better than the civilian that was."

"I would not pretend to do you good. You are too finished, too,—what shall I say? All the good that could be done you was done long ago. It is n't with you yourself I have to do. It is with what you have seen, with what you have heard."

"Your argument," said Halstead, "is a little close. Do you think you can quite make the distinction, capable as you are? Do you mean to accept the parts and repudiate the whole? I am a mere man. You must think well or ill of me, myself."

Rachel did not immediately answer. Then she called her dog. "Here, Duke!" she said. "Watch this poor gentleman who has lost his mind. I am going in the house."

But Rachel did not remain in the house. She had no fancy for the house, and a few evenings later found her again raising her head among the sprays of the garden. It was going to rain, and she looked about her at the clouds. The air was moist and warm and heavy. There was no dew and not much light.

The two engineers were upon the side piazza, smoking, reading, idling, and both from time to time looked toward the lilacs and the peonies. Halstead frowned over his paper, and the angry coal crept fast the length of his cigar. Dayton read on. It seemed to the younger man that before he could descend the piazza steps he must first knock down his chief. Dayton's presence was at times a most unpleasant protest,—none the less that he was ignorant of it. But on this occasion he was not ignorant of it, for presently he rose and looked directly at the figure moving about among the intersecting paths. It seemed as if he would say something if he could find words sufficiently exact. She had on no hat and was swinging her hands in front of her, as she walked, with slow, inaudible claps. Even at that distance she was an attractive object.

Miss Rachel Guerrin was neither light nor dark. When her nature was entirely in repose, which was not often, her complexion was clear, almost pale; and in the multitudes of other times it depended entirely upon what her emotions were,—their nature, their extent. She had a small head well poised upon her shoulders, and the brown hair which grew thick about her fore-

head had waves peculiar to itself. Her incomparable profile, with the chin well up, suggested a nature in search of the higher and more vigorous virtues; but her full face belonged to a less exacting and less formed character, and the eager expressions chasing each other across it betrayed those forces within which conflict with our slight intelligence and give life its sharpness. She looked about her with eyes that apparently wanted to see more than was presented to a casual glance, in full confidence that she must see much if her vision were nicely adjusted to the depths. Perhaps after all her attractiveness was not due so much to her features as to a certain completeness, a succinct individuality and an air of appreciative attention which she bestowed upon the world in passing. She dressed well, perhaps a trifle severely, since there was about her no floating, diaphanous drapery, and no random curls or ribbons. Her figure as yet was rather thin, and it was doubtful if it would ever round to the fullness of the woman serene. Halstead thought not.

Dayton stared a few moments rubbing his chin, then, as if the desired words did not come to him, turned on his heel and started towards the door.

" You need n't take yourself in," said Halstead looking up. " I would go just as soon with you gaping after me."

" Why don't you go, if you are going? " retorted Dayton. " I'm not your keeper. I hate to feel that you suspect me of spying after you with secret reproach. I'm not your keeper. It's no affair of mine.

If she chooses to show you all the ants and fish-worms about the premises by all means let her. No doubt she likes it. So do you. So do I; but it irritates me to be a third party, an on-looker, whom you suspect of sneaking opposition. Ten chances to one she is expecting you now while you sit there arguing. My dear fellow, I am not braced on the side of old women and strait-jackets. She waits. Maud waits. The red rose cries, the white rose weeps, and the black bat, night, does something else. Why are you here? Why don't you travel? I believe in you. My faith could move mountains.. Bestir yourself. I beg of you go, if you are going."

" You think," said Halstead, " that the attentions of a young man of society are best bestowed upon those accustomed to their happy inconsequence. You think that I am turning the hospitality of your friends into a diversion for myself."

" I don't if you don't," returned Dayton. " You know yourself best."

" Sometimes I fancy that she is coolly studying *me*," Halstead rejoined. " You may be sure she gets as much diversion as she gives."

" I don't doubt that."

" What is it you doubt, then? I have a conscience, — you are too serious."

" You are losing time," said Dayton. " Miss Guerin, I think, has found a beetle." And nodding toward the stooping figure in the garden, he turned and went within.

Halstead drew his hat down over his eyes, passed down the steps, and a moment later was bowing before the young woman under discussion.

About an hour afterward, when their walk had led them down to the river and back again to a seat between two beeches, Halstead, moved perhaps by thoughts which Dayton suggested, aided by contrition for sundry handsome speeches, of more recent date, suddenly broke off his discourse, and began again in a dry, light tone.

"I don't know," he said, "what I am running on like this for. I don't know why I came out here, where the fire-flies kindle the air. I don't know why, when I get here, my tongue should run as it does, or why you should sit listening there, with that ingenuous air. What are we doing it for,—do you know? And why did you tie that pictorial handkerchief around your head?"

"Why!" said Rachel smiling as one whose only thought was entertainment, "there is nothing you like so well as talking,—don't I listen to suit you."

"I have taxed you a great deal of late," Halstead went on, in the same light accent, "and you have borne it with great patience,—commendable patience. But there comes a time in every acquaintance, you know, when the stream of expression ceases, and the vacuity that is behind it all is allowed to be frankly apparent. It may please you to hear that no man's ideas hold out for more than six months, and that after that he respects the peace of his friend, and begins to

babble his say over again to strangers. You are not going?"

"If you can find a period," replied the girl, who had risen. "I don't want to seem rude."

"It is now some weeks since I met you," said Halstead, retaining his seat, and taking no notice of the opportunity afforded for his verbal activity to give place to physical exercise, "and the more you let me talk to you, the sooner you will be through with me. I don't know that you will gain anything by economy. Words, you know with me, are what bung-holes are to wine barrels, and when they have served their momentary purpose, the barrel is empty. Each time it is refilled it is with a new vintage. I hope you don't think that they have meaning! — that they are part and parcel of the permanent substance of the man. I have no permanent substance, Miss Rachel Desborough Guerrin, companion of fire-flies, mother of marigolds, and keeper of the dead! I talk seriously when I am lightest; and lightly when I am most serious, — idly at all times."

"You need not tell me that. You must not be afraid that I will find undue meaning in you."

"Now I *am* afraid," he said.

"Sir," said Rachel, "you are spoiling my honey-suckle."

"Once," Halstead went on, "I knew a woman who had eyes like you, and who peered about her as you do, as if she would find some deeper meaning than lay upon the surface. She looked at me like that, — like

you, but with eyes less innocent. She was what you want to be, and can't (I assure yeu that you can't, — it is n't in you), — and what little meaning there was in me, she found and took away with her. The only needle in the hay-stack, she has sticking in her bosom. You are going then? — don't go. See what a night this is. I hear a hawk."

"I must. It is getting late."

"You think me very light," he conjectured with sudden compunction.

"So light," she agreed, after a pause which sought in vain for contradiction, "that the shadows falling now must seem heavy to you," — and for a moment she seemed to see through him into the air, scarcely less thin beyond.

"Come, I like that!"

"It is time we were out of them."

"Would you leave me here, — your guest? How swift the river is!"

"We should not have come, perhaps," she said, a little doubtfully,

"Not timid, Juliet, in this familiar old garden? Your father's garden! Your mother showed me the other day a chair, grown fast high up in an apple-tree, which she said was near the ground when you used to sit in it. I should say you knew every twig, and every goblin here, — except me. Am I the goblin that sends you to the house? If I were a bouncer now, like Dayton, you might go."

"If you were Mr. Dayton I would stay. It is n't really late. I don't care for that."

"What! have you been making up with Dayton?
That can't be."

"He doesn't talk to hear himself, you know."

"If anything could make him talk, it would be you. He once grew eloquent about you. But he is dumb, he is dumb. Dayton is a capital fellow. All the secrets of his reticent heart doubtless do him honor. All his intentions do him honor too. He is very clear about his intentions. Taking him through and through, he is the most respectable man I ever knew."

"All your friends know that," said Rachel.

"But he would never be out here," Halstead resumed. "He shuts himself up and preserves his balance. This is a bewildering place. Please sit down again. I have no peace of mind while you stand like that. I want to tell you that I am going to Boston to-morrow."

"What?"

"I am going to Boston to-morrow."

"To stay?" asked the girl, sitting down.

"For a time. Tell me, in politeness, you are sorry I am going and will be glad when I return."

"Must you go?"

"I am a restless fellow."

"Yes, I know."

"Besides I am sent. You won't say it then? You are not like me. You are close-mouthed. You are indifferent."

"I may be different," she answered. "I am not indifferent."

"I am sorry to leave," said Halstead.

"I wonder if that is true," said Rachel.

"You are always wondering if what I say is true; not offensively, but as if you were groping after a standard more accurate than mine. Well, what do you conclude?"

"All I ever knew or thought was true has turned to wonder since you came," said Rachel lightly, smoothing with both hands her ruffled hair. "When I quit wondering I will have a new set of thoughts. The wind is stirring."

And she held out her hands, palms upward, to inquire for the rain.

"What are you going to give me before I go?" persisted the young man. "Some souvenir would be in order. A ribbon or a hair-pin is neat. We are having, you know, a sort of flirtation, and no flirtation is complete without at least an exchange of geranium leaves. It is very touching. It fills to repletion the worldly heart. I have known men and women by scores so satisfied with a sprig of geranium that they never craved anything more. If you had such a thing about you, now"—

"Come," cried Rachel. "It is beginning to rain. I felt a drop on my hand."

"Give me *that?*" said Halstead with genuine thirst. But Rachel gathered up her skirts and started back along the walk.

There were lights moving about the door-yard as she reached it, and Dayton, advancing from the region of the stables, held a lantern aloft.

" Halloa ! " cried Halstead, from behind. " What 's up ? "

Dayton stopped, and the lantern illumined Rachel's face with the silk bandana about her head. She looked exceeding bright, restless, spirited.

" What 's up ? " repeated Halstead.

" The horses got out," answered Dayton, dropping the light. " I have been helping to turn them in. They were tearing up the yard."

" I thought at first," said Nathan, " that you were trying the Diogenes game."

" What is the matter with the house ? " asked Rachel, looking up at the dark front. " No lamps lighted."

" The ladies were called away. Did n't Halstead tell you ? "

" No."

" Somebody lay sick with a fever. Perhaps Simon Peter's wife's mother."

" That poor woman was buried ages ago," Rachel observed.

" Ah, yes, I remember," he rejoined. " I heard the bells."

But finely as he felt they were getting on, Halstead almost wished that Rachel would receive his remarks a little less as they were meant ; that she would answer in a way a little less light and bright ; that she would be a little less unconscious ; and a little less unembarrassed, as he strolled with her about the garden in the early evening. She did not seem to mind his presence quite as it was to be presumed she would.

VI.

A DAY or two after Halstead's departure, Dayton received a letter from him, in which, after the preliminary business matters, he said : —

" My sister, Mrs. Sterling, with her family and some of her friends, are looking about during this bumble-bee weather for a retreat among the mountains, and having heard me in unguarded moments upon the subject of the Pocumtuck and the scenery adjacent, think they might be pleased in Beaudeck. My dear friend, forgive and help me; together we may avert the invasion.

" They say, I believe, that the change would do them good, — they all need it. Young women, you know, can evolve from the mystery they miscall their health some physical excuse for any trip whatever, and on the shortest possible notice. Their constitutions are trained to it; their well-being is and must be synonymous with their pleasure. There is no doubt about it; go they must; but, hist! where? By all means, I think, to some noxious, sulphurous spring; to some beach washed by the kindly Atlantic for fashionable uses; to some staring, sylvan resort where on wide, white verandas they can enjoy their flounces, their peopled solitude, and a blessed immunity from active thought. Beaudeck you know is a trifle aus-

tere. Her streams may be limpid, her skies cerulean, but she has a serious and searching air, and she throws one back upon one's self in a way that would not be tolerated in a watering-place.

"I have told them there was no hotel there; but with perverse amiability they abominate hotels, and beg me to ask you to find quarters for them at some country house. I have told them, too, that they would find no comforts and no amusements, but only to learn that they have always been as averse to comfort and amusement as to hotels. I have even told them that since the days of King Philip's War, the country has never been free from brandishing tomahawks, and that the once frenzied people still put on their hats with a sense of gratitude for crowns to cover. It was no go. They are solidly in favor of the Indian, with all his traditionary privileges.

"I give it up. It is your turn now. There will be six or seven in the party, children, nurses, and all, and as they want to return with me, there is no time to lose. Genial friends, of course, in Boston,—genial friends anywhere; but what would they do off there on the border, and how could we entertain them, till frost relieved us? Invention would fail. It is a trifling matter, but I am not in the mood. I am selfish. I am narrow,—narrow as the valley up yonder,—and I have no lodgings to let.

"My cousin Margaret Duncan is one of them, and by her practical side one could preserve an undisturbed parallel for any number of summers; but Miss

Mason is the other,— you remember Miss Mason. Then Jim Meade and Mr. Sterling would, of course, as in duty bound, occasionally appear.

“As your talents point in every direction rather than toward finesse, let me suggest that you write immediately and say how it is,— no possible accommodations, and so on. I would be obliged to you, and you may, beside, give thanks to yourself.”

When Dayton read this he straightened himself with instant decision, and in that decision he coincided with his friend. With women, Jared Dayton was exceedingly reluctant, and when their society was proposed to him, he was apt to raise an averting hand and shake his head. During the time Halstead had known him, he had never known him extend to them other than common civilities ; but what lay back of that time he could not tell, and whether the restrictions that bound him, were a matter of temperament, or the result of dear experience, he could not even guess. Dayton rarely talked of women. He did not, in truth, even cultivate thoughts of them. When by chance he was thrown in their society, he appeared sufficiently well not to come under the ban of even the most fastidious, but he did not seek occasion to be alone with any one of them. He was slow ; recently he had pronounced himself slow to excess,— unnecessarily slow,— infernally slow. He had the manner of a man chiefly intent upon minding his own business. He was as earnest as if nature forbade him to look lightly upon this grinding world, and as much at his ease as if he

expected to live in it always, and was making the best of it. He never rebelled. He never exulted. Apparently he had concluded that insensibility was the wiser role. When a mere boy, the necessity of making money had forced itself upon him with absoluteness, and he had been endeavoring to make money ever since, with vague and passionate intentions regarding the time subsequent to fortune. But he was thirty-six, and his fortune was not yet made. He had no time for deviation. His eyes were fixed. His hand was on the plow. He loved his profession silently, fervently. He was one-sided,—developed only in the direction of what was least sentimental and emotional. In fact whatever touched his emotions seemed to have ruinous designs upon his happiness, and he had a very clear notion, born of a season in the past, and of certain well-defined tendencies of his closeted being, that that way storms lay.

Occasionally he envied young Halstead those traits which signalized him: his ability to pursue to advantage several interests at once; his social adroitness the dexterity with which he created the opportunities he wanted; and that peculiar temper, constitution, or whatever it was, that commanded such ready and warm response. He envied him now the facility of his letter, and tried to imagine himself answering it with equal ease, and to the desired effect. Either way, to come or not to come, the idea of his personal interposition, irritated him. Finally he read it again slowly, and with greater care. "Mason? Mason?" he said. "That was the name."

Then he made a brief statement of the contents of the note, and asked, experimentally, if there was any place in the vicinity where they took summer boarders.

"Yes," said Miss Hannah with great promptness,—such promptness as was calculated to remove indecision; "year before last a family stayed three months or more at Mrs. Anderson's. That is the nearest place,—a mile, or thereby, up the north road. She is a good woman, and she has a large house. I think she would like the help. It would be a kindness. She is a widow. We know her through the church. Her husband died of the consumption,—they all do. She has two boys who will have it too. To live among those who have consumption makes people strange and wistful. If your friends don't care where they go, it would be well for them to go there. It would be doing good. The rich and poor should fit together. You might drive up there now; the carryall is in front. Perhaps Rachel will take you. Rachel!"

"Certainly," said Rachel, wondering how she would get through a drive alone with the august engineer, but glad to be of service to one who asked so few favors of his fellow-men.

Dayton hesitated, unprepared to have his nebulous plan thus framed and ready for instant execution. Rachel stood before him with her hat. He bowed, expressed his thanks; and they started off together.

"Do you want these people to come?" he asked, as they settled back in their places on the front seat of

the carryall, "because if you don't, we won't have them, that is all. It would be easy. Just say the word. I must tell you that Halstead does not care about it. He said I was to tell them there was no room."

"But there *is* room," said Rachel; "we won't do that."

"There is no room if you don't want them. It is your territory."

"I would be ashamed not to want them," she answered. "Don't you want them?"

"Yes; on the whole I want them."

"You know them, then?"

"Slightly."

"And like them?"

"Mrs. Sterling," he said, "is bright. Her husband and brother are both my friends. Her circle is a pleasant one to live in, if one has plenty of time."

"And the others?"

"Miss Mason I have only seen once or twice."

"Where did you see her?"

"At Mrs. Sterling's."

"Is she pretty?"

"She is tall and pale; taller than you, and very much paler. She wears odd jewelry and stuffs from India."

"She is stylish then."

"Probably."

"But that is not saying that she is pretty."

"I have heard her called striking."

"Then she is more than pretty."

"More,—and less. She has fine manners. She holds her head high."

"Young, is she?" said Rachel, bending down and brushing something from her dress.

"She may be twenty-four or five,—perhaps twenty-four or five hundred."

"That is n't very close guessing. Which does she seem to be?"

"Her face is young."

"She can't very well be older than her face."

"Oh yes, she can. Her smile belongs to a woman of the Roman Empire in its decline. It is very strange and melancholy. It distorts her features."

"Perhaps her health is poor. I have seen women look like that when they had poor health."

"Perhaps," said Dayton; "I never heard it mentioned."

"Does she seem well?"

"She goes a great deal."

"Goes where?"

"To the opera, to the shops, to dinners, to Saratoga. Where is it that young ladies go?"

"Why does she want to come here?"

"Now, I can't answer. Her motives are deeper than I can get."

"Who called her striking?"

"Halstead. She is a friend of his. She is rich. She is alone,—as much alone as one who is rich can conveniently be. She has a great deal at her command."

"And yet you say he does not care to have them come. Perhaps she is lacking somewhere else. She may not be agreeable. She may be tiresome. Perhaps she is only striking in her looks."

And she looked at him with keener inquiry in her face than lay in her sentences. Dayton did not seem to relish it.

"And do you too," he asked with an assumption of lightness, "lay such stress on the agreeable, the versatile, the striking? Is there no homely quality that recommends itself to you? What is your opinion of fidelity? How would single-mindedness strike you?"

"Do you suppose," said Rachel, "that she is like that?"

"I don't know," answered Dayton with sudden coolness. "I don't suppose anything about it. We will give her the benefit of the doubt."

Rachel neither assented nor dissented, and presently Dayton asked her if she read much, with an abrupt withdrawing from intimate communication, and a safe return to exoteric topics, which frequently marked his conversation. She thought he asked it as friends of her father's had been wont to ask her how old she was, or if she went to school; and recalled what Halstead had once said about the cockatoos and coal mines.

When however they had reached the upper valley and had come within sight of Mrs. Anderson's house, Dayton again reverted to the strangers.

"Suppose," he said, "we drive on past. We need n't trouble ourselves. I assure you they will turn the

valley upside down. Every day there will be a picnic. They have no pity. They devise the most atrocious pleasures, from which there is no escape. They reach out their slim hands and draw whoever they want into their schemes. I feel as if I were assisting in a plot, and I am clumsy at plots. Are you quite sure that you want them? — I leave it to you. Imagine you see them driving along the highway every time you look up. Imagine them under your elms. They leave the gates open. They stir up breezes. They might stir up a breeze which would take your breath away! We can turn back yet; Mrs. Anderson has no prevision of our errand. We can take our drive and go home. I should consider the drive in itself a sufficient end and aim. You still have the opportunity to back out."

"I don't want to back out," said Rachel. "The more you say the more I want them to come."

"Miss Guerrin," cried Dayton, "you are a brave girl. I am going to give you a laurel blossom." And getting out of the carriage he ascended the steep side of the mountain that rose above them and brought back a belated sprig of that honorable flower.

"And you feel no hesitation," he asked as he handed it to her; "you want them all, — the whole powerful posse comitatus?"

"All," she answered, wondering at his change of manner.

"We will transport the town," he exclaimed. "I will build them an hotel myself."

"Of course," she said thoughtfully, "it is pleasant to have strangers here."

"Then I am happy in being one," he answered. "How long may one hope to preserve that pleasant but transitory relation? What a pity that one must so soon degenerate into a friend, even though one fall no further!"

"I should say," said Rachel, doubtful of a speculation so intrusive, "that no one could preserve it longer than you."

"But since you have declared it pleasant," said he, "I should still hesitate to advance. That is offering a premium on distance."

And that night Dayton wrote to Halstead saying: "I can't be of any use to you in this matter. I have inquired about here in the interest of your friends with effect contrary to your suggestion. They can find very tolerable accommodations at a large and finely located house a mile or more from the village, toward Spaz. If that will do why not have them come?"

Even after getting this off his mind he sat up quite late. He was not satisfied. Either way matters were not going to suit him. There was an irritation in the wind. His profession did not absorb him with its old kindness and closeness, and he wished he had not meddled with what did not concern him.

VII.

THE venerable stage that went to the train on an evening shortly following was crowded for the first time in years,—it being, like everything else in the village, many sizes too large for its ordinary uses.. It lumbered slowly across the bridge and along the shaded road, while from its windows peered the animated heads of blue-veiled strangers ; their long kid gloves slipped in the faded hand-rests, their figures swaying with the motion, their attention divided between the scenery and the vivacious discussions conducted by young Halstead within. They expressed themselves pleased with everything,—the hills, the river, the cattle in the fields, the very stones by the roadside,—and declared they would forego the sea-shore and stay there all summer. They even hummed an air from “Mignon” illustrative of their mood. As the sole occupants of this ancient vehicle (a relic of past prosperity, and a decayed stage route) they already felt the confidence of possession, the freedom of adventure, the ease of accustomed travelers, and the spirit of powerful patrons who, by their late example, would lift a lapsed village a century forward. In the midst of this talking and gazing and approving and rolling at ease, the coach suddenly turned through an arched gateway, stopped a moment before a structure

made up of steps, of columns, of wings, and a great deal of faded gray paint ; then rolled on again, leaving Dayton upon the steps bowing his adieux to its occupants, while Halstead with his hat in his hand made a low salute to a bare-headed, graceful girl upon the piazza.

"Why, where are we ?" asked Mrs. Sterling, looking quickly back through the elms.

"This is where we live," answered Halstead. "The home of the unique, the antique Desboroughs."

"I thought at first it was some asylum," observed Miss Duncan.

"So it is,—for disabled engineers," said Halstead.

"Disabled!" exclaimed Miss Mason.

"For those with a halt in their resolution," replied Nathan.

"And was that Miss Guerrin?" Mrs. Sterling inquired.

"The very same, dear sister."

"Why did n't you tell us?"

"Tell you what?"

"About her. Who would have expected to see her like that?"

Nathan laughed, as if his own judgment had been indirectly confirmed by a competent critic. "You would not have believed me if I had," he said. "You would have thought that pastoral associations had got the better of me. I scarcely believe in her myself yet."

"It is n't necessary that you should," observed his sister.

"I expect her to appear some morning prim, angular, and crude," the young man went on.

"I hope she may, for her own sake," Mrs. Sterling declared,— "that is, if you flutter about her much."

"Is she an intelligent person?" inquired Miss Duncan, who invariably asked after a person's intelligence.

"You must be the judge," said Halstead deferentially.

"Then your opinion must be a good one," commented the lady. "Nobody ever withholds one that is averse."

"She shall come to call upon you," Nathan asserted.

There was a little pause, and then Mrs. Sterling took up the conversation.

"It is astonishing to me about these village girls," she said. "I have noticed it before. They live narrow little lives, and yet, when occasion permits, they step gracefully out, self-possessed, as good as the best, and not even behind in the fashions. I confess I don't understand it. I should think it would take them years to mortify themselves into good manners. I keep expecting them to do something queer. I confess I have a prejudice against anything queer. It makes me squirm. That is, anything queer in the way of manners. I stayed once at a place in the White Mountains where the daughters of the house taught school in winter, and waited on the boarders in summer. One of them was told to pass the rolls, and with the utmost gravity put one down beside my plate as if

it had been a piece of chalk. That is the sort of thing I mean. You can't always tell what to expect."

"My dear sister," cried Halstead with emphasis, "it is you, this time, who are a trifle off. For mercy's sake, — not in this connection!"

"Oh, no, not in this connection, of course," assented Mrs. Sterling, — "nothing so bad as that! But once too I made calls with a popular young belle from a country town, and she gave our cards to the lady herself whom we went to call upon. You can't tell. In everything else she was unexceptionable."

"My dear sister," protested Halstead again, "spare us!"

"Of course I ought not to feel so. I confess it is prejudice on my part. I mean to overcome it. I have always said I would overcome it. Nobody likes a fresh young girl better than I do. Miss Guerrin may have the best of manners; better than ours even. She may *never* do anything out of the way,—you seem to think not. I don't pretend to say; but you must admit she has no great advantages for observation."

"She shall come to call upon you," repeated the young man.

"Of course, I will be glad to have her. You are peculiarly situated. I shall treat her as I would a Knickerbocker."

"Theoretically, I assure you they would make no concessions to the Knickerbockers."

"So bad as that!" exclaimed Miss Mason, looking over the top of her fan, with her pale blue eyes.

"You are missing something, by the way," said Halstead. "You should be looking out. We are now in the heart of Beaudeck. We are about to leave the mail-bags at the grocery. These small boys under our wheels represent the clergy and the foreign element, but for whom there would be no shinney in the streets and no accidents in the mill-dam. What do you think of the place?"

After throwing off the mail-bags, in whose capacious pockets a few lonely letters rattled, the coach swept grandly around, and doubling upon its course for a short distance began its lumbering ascent through the gorge to the upper valley. The western sunlight struck through the overhanging trees, birds rose in the air, and the brook, whose ravages had made this exit practicable, tumbled and roared and dashed itself into spray against the rocks. It seemed as if a road so innocent must lead to a retreat as peaceful.

But that evening when the frogs were in vociferous chorus, and the crickets were sawing their tuneful legs, when Halstead had taken his departure, and the ladies had gone up to their square, bare rooms, Louise Mason dropped down upon a stool with her hands clasped before her, and with a gloomy sort of apathy watched the motions of the other ladies as they unpacked their trunks, and spread their voluminous dresses upon the bed.

"Come, Louise," said Mrs. Sterling, "why ar'n't you unpacking?"

"It seems too ridiculous," said Louise, "all that stuff up here. Whatever possessed us to hunt up such an owl's nest as this to summer in?" — and rising she began to walk about, with an irritated air and a clouded brow.

"You will like it better by to-morrow, — by daylight," said Mrs. Sterling, with cheerful reassurance.

"I shall go back," cried Louise. "What I don't like to-day suits me still less to-morrow."

"You are vexed about something, or about nothing," pursued the other. "What has come over you? I think it is delightful. You will think so too, shortly. Come, unpack."

"My dear Helen," said Miss Mason, "you are too amiable. You think everything delightful. You said the same thing about our landlady, and about the cream on our strawberries. You keep yourself always ready to be tickled by delight. I believe if a pin scratched you, you would bleed delight. If you have any other feeling I don't know where you hide it. You are like your brother."

"Then you mean to compliment me! I am sure you approve my brother."

"Oh, yes, you are very sure. You are all too sure. I tell you I shall go back."

"We have engaged board here for most of the season, you know," said Margaret Duncan.

"We can pay for it and leave it, I suppose."

"You were as anxious to come as any of us," suggested Mrs. Sterling. "Who was it that first advocated Beaudeck?"

"I was that miserable being," assented the girl. "But this is n't Beaudeck. This is the heart of nowhere. We are farther from Beaudeck now than we were in Boston. We should have brought our horses."

"I will take out your dresses for you if you say so," offered Margaret. "They are laid in here like sardines; who packed them?"

"Mother. She always packs."

"What did you do before you had a mother?" said Helen Sterling, looking up from the drawer she was arranging.

"I had to wait on myself," answered Louise, turning back with a short laugh. "My poor little mother! She did n't want me to try the country. 'Louise,' she said, 'you will be bitten by gnats.' She thinks it most terrible to be bitten by gnats."

"What lovely clothes!" said Mrs. Sterling, as Margaret set aside a trunk tray. "When you have nothing else to do, Louise, you can try new effects in costume."

"I imagine that will be most of the time. What are we to do anyway?"

"Do? All sorts of things. Nathan will tell us. He knows all that is worth doing in any locality."

"He has his hands full already," answered the girl. Anybody can see that."

"It is for you to empty them then."

"I am afraid we have made a mistake," said Louise, going to the window again, and looking off over the swaying tree-tops. "I am afraid we have made a mistake. Oh, these owls!"

Miss Mason was twenty-six years old. For several of these years she had known Nathan Halstead, during which time her smiles had grown old though her face was still young. He could be very refreshing when he chose, and he had entered her wealthy, inert, and stranded existence, like a salt breeze blowing through a close drawing-room. The burden of inanity with which she was weighted had sensibly lightened under his sallies, and she had felt great shocks of animation when he paid her audacious compliments in the conservatory after supper. They were the only shocks she had ever had, and they in some way had seared her smiles. And Halstead had greatly admired the style of her exotic dresses; her assured bearing; the lining of her phaeton; perhaps the dividends from her investments; but he straightened himself and looked attentive when it was suggested that she should come to the country. Then his hands stole into his pockets and he strolled away.

VIII.

LET it not be supposed that in the minds of the Desborough sisters all was untroubled and serene. They were too conscientious for so much light enjoyment as was going on within their serious precincts, and in reality were sorely puzzled as to Rachel's immediate future. It was not that they would have her live on as they had done ; it was not that they would have her go away ; it was not that they would have her marry ; all these courses had very objectionable, insufficient, and profane features. Had they carefully reared, tended, watered, and brought her to her present beautiful state of inflorescence, only to find that nothing was good enough for her the rest of the way ? To their over-reflective and scrupulous minds it seemed so, and while trying to conceive and arrange some adequate future for her, they felt with alarm that her future was fast stealing upon her, and that she might even be over before they had decided upon the sort of superior celebration her days were to be. And not only were they puzzled about the mature destiny of their rare offspring, but there were also inherent qualities in her character and person which perplexed them still more, — qualities that had not appeared to confuse their own straightforward careers, — a superfluity of beauty, a disqualifying imagination, an eagerness for

pleasure, a certain independence of understanding, and a ready assimilation with new elements. They felt feeble to deal with her. They had trained her in childhood with great nicety ; they had sent her to school ; they had taken her to Boston ; but they had not meant to produce quite such extreme and irrepressible results. They regretted that of late years, which included the whole of Rachel's life, they had allowed their outside connections to become so few and slight, and wished that she might have companions of her own age, and the pleasures due her young womanhood ; yet when chance brought a fluttering and elegant party right there to the village, their foreboding maternal hearts found in it as much cause for anxiety as congratulation. They especially shrank when they thought of Mr. Young Halstead, as Miss Hannah called him ; but no sooner would their fears condemn him than, in a desire to do him justice, they would give him every praise. These fears were not wholly disguised.

"We don't like it that he should be so constantly with Rachel," said Mrs. Guerrin to her husband.
"We wish you would speak to him."

"Speak to him ! And what should I tell him ?" inquired that gentleman.

"Tell him,—tell him"—and there she stopped.
"It will be time enough to speak to him when we can think of something to say to him," said Mr. Guerrin.

"It will be too late then."

"Then I don't see what we are to do."

"We thought you might warn him."

"We mean him well and he means us well. You can't warn honest people against honest people without slandering somebody."

"But is he honest?" she said, trembling with the possible guiltiness of her suspicion.

"It is only fair to think him so," he answered, and then she felt condemned, — condemned and still uneasy.

That afternoon as she sat in the sitting-room stitching, Rachel came in, and leaning over the centre table began eating some white cherries from a green majolica dish. A tall, old clock, which pointed to six, was loudly ticking a slow and solemn protest against all light uses of time, in a way which would not be tolerated for an hour in a French time-piece, whose style of clock opera invites to everything rapid and gay, and Mrs. Guerrin's mind was ticking in unison with its serious seconds.

While they were thus engaged some one came up the walk and they both looked quickly out; but it was not the engineers, whose arrival was momentarily expected. It was a messenger who, after a loud tap at the brass knocker, gave notice that the gentlemen who stayed there had gone up to the tunnel and would not be back for several days.

"What a pity," exclaimed Rachel when he had gone, "and their friends here such a short time too!"

"It would be better if they had never come," said

Mrs. Guerrin timorously. "We are afraid they are too — too worldly."

"They are not too worldly for me," said Rachel. "I like it. I am worldly too."

"We don't object so much to the ladies," said Mrs. Guerrin, borne to greater lengths by this sad avowal, "but there is Mr. Halstead! He may never have done anything wrong; we don't say he has, but he does n't seem to have any moral constitution. Hannah said herself, that he did n't seem to have any moral constitution. No moral constitution, and no serious thoughts, Hannah thinks."

"He has some beautiful ones," ventured the girl.

"Could it be that you were a little, — a little" —

Rachel's face grew as red as her mother's was pale.

"I like him," she cried. "I never get tired of him. There is nobody like him; he has seen so much, done so much. He goes more easily than he stands. I *enjoy* him!"

"It is n't safe, — it is n't safe!" said Mrs. Guerrin, trembling.

"Oh, no, it is n't safe," repeated Rachel gayly.

The next two days crept along with strangely retarded motion. The evenings dragged; the noon-time scarcely stirred. It took an hour for the clock to strike twelve; and an hour for each team to pass. When a rooster began to crow he finished day after to-morrow; and each sun that came up set the week after next. They were the longest days of Rachel's slow-paced life. On the evening of the second she wandered

idly around the house, her thoughts coming and going like flocks of high-flying birds which appear out of the dim, southern skies, and, sweeping overhead, are lost again in the northern distance.

Presently she looked down the still road at the white cottages with green blinds ; then at the covered bridge spanning the brook ; then at the opening in the mountains leading to the upper valley, and at the carriage slowly descending through the gorge. She recalled the bountiful braids of Miss Mason, also the commanding manner of that lady. She thought of asking them all down to the Desborough place, and wondered what she should wear on that occasion, and what sort of a repast she should have. Then she pictured their flounces under the trees, and Miss Mason walking out to the dining-room, her hand upon the arm of Mr. Halstead and her silk dress trailing behind. Ladies of the elegant society sort had a wonderful attraction for Rachel,—as great an attraction as epigrams upon life. She enjoyed their habitual graces ; their full trimmings, their affable manners, and the care they took to make all things appear their best ; but the thought of Miss Mason was like a bird of another feather among the sky-flyers of her imagination.

Strolling round the north wing, something upon the side of the house claimed her attention, and leaning against a trellis, she fixed her eyes upon a knot-hole through which a swarm of vagabond bees were trying to domesticate themselves under the weather-boards. While this was going on young Halstead came driving

rapidly up the road, and, heedless of the approaching carriage, turned in at the gateway. His restless, rapid glance swept the premises, but seeing no one he entered the front hall and went through the parlor to the wing. He tried to persuade himself that he wanted some estimates, and wondered meanwhile where Rachel Guerrin was. A restless desire, which, however probable in others, he had not anticipated in himself, had come over him while away; and, as he rarely omitted that which would make life easier, he had returned in obedience to it. As he went over to his desk with absent mind he caught a glimpse of a figure by the trellis, and crossing to the window, like one at whose feet his wish had fallen, seated himself in front of it, leaning upon the sill with his hat in both hands.

"Good evening," he said. "What chance is this?"

"I thought you were down the road," said Rachel, in some confusion caused by her position so near his window.

"So I am," he answered.

"You were not to be back till to-morrow."

"Neither will I."

"You are at work there?"

"Yes. I am also here. When one has to be in two places at once his most habitual self is given the preference, is n't it? Did you ever hear of a man hiring a substitute to take a pleasure trip for him while he over-worked himself in peace? I drove up. If you will permit me I will come out and join you."

Rachel waited. She waited some moments; then

started toward the piazza. She met Halstead upon the steps coming toward her, but he looked annoyed, and said something at random about the hilly roads. He was evidently disconcerted, and the joyous freedom of his manner had given place to a bored constraint.

In fact, as he left his room the moment before, throwing wide open the door in his haste, he confronted Dayton upon the threshold, and a certain obliquity came into his restless, eager glance.

"I thought," said Dayton, "that you were at the quarry."

Halstead recovered himself and answered likewise. "And I thought you were at the tunnel."

"I found I had to be at the cut to morrow," answered Dayton impenetrably, "so came along on the train. How did you get in?"

"Drove," replied Halstead, and something possessed him to add, "It is the first fruit of your candor. Now that our Boston friends are here we can't desert them."

IX.

IMMEDIATELY after supper Halstead attired himself in garments of recent importation, and started on foot up through the gorge, forgetting in his annoyance the horse and wagon in the stable yard. He did not ask Dayton to go with him, and Dayton did not offer. Neither did he mention his departure to Miss Guerrin. He walked slowly, and instead of the dashing manner with which he had driven into the village kept his eyes upon the road before him, and his thoughts upon the circumstance that propelled him in default of an animating will. He called himself a fool, — doubly a fool. A fool to have driven eleven miles over a rough mountain road, and a fool to have cheated himself out of his folly lest Dayton should discover it. He laughed in self-derision ; then, on the principle that if a man is a fool and acknowledges it he ceases to be one, considered that he had ceased to be one. And still the idea would recur to him. He was very much out of sorts.

When he arrived at Mrs. Anderson's he discerned the dresses of his friends out near the borders of the orchard, where he joined them. But in a little while, finding himself in no humor for polite conversation, he wandered off with his sister's children, and when the ladies started back to the house he was lying unseen

upon the grass, and the boys were building a fort around him with the stones that had once formed a wall between the orchard and meadow. He raised his head to look after their retreating figures with a feeble thought of following them, when Tommy, who was still in petticoats, sat down upon him in obedience to his brother's orders, and this light obstacle confirmed his lack of purpose.

He listened to the swallows and tree-toads; he looked at the pines on the mountains. How sweet the hay was! And a cloud on the horizon had a wonderful complexion! Yet in the gray depths of the evening there was a hopeless perfection, and in the blankness of space an equilibrium like death. How patient the hills were; what were they waiting for? How breathless the valley! What suspension! What great, what divine indifference! What negation, what sleep! It depressed him; it had in it a species of anguish. If the world were made out of nothing there seemed plenty of material left, around, above, and within him for another effort,—something better yet. When his bones crumbled and he became a permanent part of a hillside, he might waste himself on inanimate things. In the mean time the evening was escaping him. He shook himself. He did not lie easily on the grass. What he cared for was friends,—friends strong and active, and beauty of the sort that laughs and caresses and bereaves. There was Rachel Guerrin; what was she probably doing? Why should a man stint himself the moment he found something sweet?

He raised himself up, but his foot demolished part of the fort like a Krupp gun, and it took him some moments to repair the breach and pacify the garrison. Then he led a sortie against an invisible enemy, and debouching among the currant bushes, betrayed his compatriots into the hands of their mother.

He would have gone on his way but at that moment Louise Mason came out. It seemed unavoidable, so he lingered for a moment upon the square and unadorned veranda.

Louise had on a dress of some dull blue fabric, and over her shoulders was a dull blue shawl, which an uncle had brought her from Ispahan. Dress as she would, however, she looked strange to him in Beau-deck,—like a gala-rosette on a work-day, he said, and he missed her usual background of cushions. The rugged surroundings brought out a certain want of nerve in her, and it was always on the end of his tongue to tell her, in handsomely clothed language, to brace up.

"We are glad to see you back," began Louise, who had failed to carry out her intention of going home. "When did you come?"

"An hour or two ago. You see I lost no time," answered Halstead, making a virtue of his unpremeditated promptness. "You knew we were away then? I am glad of that."

"Miss Guerrin told us," said Louise.

"Did she?" said Halstead, negatively.

"We have quite made the acquaintance of your

friends," Mrs. Sterling remarked. "Miss Guerrin was here again yesterday."

"What did she say?" the young man inquired, still negatively.

"Nothing brilliant," Mrs. Sterling assured him, with sisterly candor. "Nothing that was n't altogether young and commonplace."

"Don't be hard on her," protested Nathan. "She is more generous. She said some pretty things of you."

"Ah! she tried that, did she? And how did you receive it?"

"I thanked her, and told her the resemblance was very great."

"Then she made her point?"

"No. She did n't agree with me. She said she could n't see any resemblance whatever."

"When she flatters you, then, she does n't do it through me?" pursued his sister.

"She declines to flatter me," asserted Halstead.

"Or Mr. Dayton, either, it would appear. She agreed with Margaret that he was very stiff. All the burden of his defense rested with me."

"So he is," Nathan assented. "With her he is stiffer than ever, — not so much stiff, perhaps, as remote. He always speaks to her from a fourth story window. How did she look yesterday?"

"I am bound to say she looked well. Has she really always lived here, and never seen any society except that of centenarians? I don't suppose she ever even saw a German!"

"I fear not," answered Halstead with mock pity.

"We ought to get up one for her benefit," suggested Mrs. Sterling, her propensity for getting up benefits overruling every other consideration. "What a god-send you must be to her? What do you do for her entertainment?"

"You forget," said Halstead, "that I am not here pleasuring. Dayton is pushing things like mad. He works all day on the road, and sits up half the night over his figures. He has a passion for figures. For my part I never see one that I don't want to knock it down,—particularly 5's."

"Why did n't he come up here with you?" asked Louise.

"I don't know. I did n't ask him, and he did n't volunteer."

"Perhaps he preferred to stay with Miss Guerrin," observed Mrs. Sterling.

Halstead paused, looked at her curiously a moment, then laughed a short refutation of so improbable a suggestion.

Mrs. Sterling passed on into the house, and Halstead still stared at the spot where she had been. Raising his glance it fell upon Louise Mason, in whose dull, pale eyes there was a larger vacuum than usual, and he seemed to feel called upon to stir himself to greater social exertion. He had been moving about on the porch; now he sat down, picked up her fan, which was also of a dull blue, and proceeded to adjust it to her chatelaine with an air of long but delicate familiarity.

"You wear such bewildering things," he said gently, disengaging at the same time her vinaigrette. "What is the use of this? Any warmth in it? Will you probably faint if I retain it a few moments?"

"It is possible," answered Louise.

"Very well," he said, sniffing the salts up his high-bred nostrils. "Please proceed."

Louise recrossed her feet (her shoes were cut out in slats to show her dull blue stockings) and smiled,—a smile shot with crow's feet. Halstead looked at it and wished she would n't.

"How do you like your quarters?" he inquired, with secret chafing at the delay.

"It is pleasant enough," she replied, glancing off down the valley, "pleasant but uneventful."

"I knew you would find it so," he declared. "I don't suppose you ever before spent a week in which nothing happened. You see what it is!"

"It is n't every occurrence these days that has the effect of something happening," she said. "The ordinary run of events at home was scarcely more effective than their absence here. I can't say I miss them."

His ear caught something not in her words. "You have a way of emphasizing 'these days' as if they had reference to some more propitious then, or other. Why do you?" he cried bravely. "Now! then! when! they never resemble each other. You must n't do it. It is n't progressive."

"I'm not progressive, and you know it," she answered coolly, shaking her long sapphire earrings.

"Where have you been since I saw you last?" he asked, dropping the former subject, as if he feared it might grow hot.

"No place in particular. We have driven about a good deal. It has been warm."

"I should think it had. For genuine hot weather command me to the forty-fifth parallel. Down where we have been the thermometer went up to where it says mules die. Up here it is better. What do time-servers do in the country when it is too warm for picnics? Can't we think of something new? What do you say to going down to the point where we are at work? Don't you think there might be some amusement in that?"

"Certainly," said Louise. "When could we go?"

"I leave the day to you."

"On Saturday?"

"Saturday is as good a day as any. They are all the same size."

Some one within lighted a lamp which streamed across the veranda. Louise got up to move her chair within the shadow, and Halstead took the opportunity to look at his watch. It was nine o'clock. He too arose, and making some hasty excuse abruptly took his leave.

The moonlight was white upon the narrow road, and he strode along at a rapid pace as if a board of directors were waiting for him in special session. When he reached the point above the mill where the road began its steep descent, he peered through the trees at the

great gray house whither he was bound. The lights were all burning; so he ran along more rapidly than before. When he reached it the gate closed behind him with a click. Then Dayton appeared in the lighted doorway; then Rachel.

Halstead suddenly felt very warm and much excited. He took off his hat and passed the finest of cambric handkerchiefs across his forehead.

But he saw Rachel no more that night.

X.

In the course of the preparations for the tea-drinking at the Desborough place, Miss Desborough, the elder, sent Rachel to the wing to inquire of a servant engaged there as to the whereabouts of a misplaced cream-jug which was of rare and homely shape and covered with beasts of paleozoic pattern. The maid was in an inner room, and Rachel advanced as far as the dressing bureau, where she turned mechanically to give a few touches before the mirror to the loose locks about her shapely head. In so doing her eyes fell from her own reflection to Miss Mason's vinaigrette lying at ease upon the silk pin-cushion, and the deft touches to her waving hair changed to a slight pressure of the palms upon her temples. Through one of the links of its chain there ran a long scarf pin, and near by, like an arrogant sentinel, stood a short, much bloated, and impertinent vial labeled Pommade Hongroise pour fixer les Moustaches. E. Coudray, Parfumeur, à Paris. Such association tells endless stories which are either exceedingly sad or exceedingly sweet ! It seemed to indicate to Rachel either great tenderness or a very sportive friendship between its owner and treasurer, and to bring back to her mind the apprehensions of the night before which had been foreshadowed by Dayton.

And yet that evening after the tea-drinking, when

Mr. Guerrin was showing the place to Mrs. Sterling and Halstead to Miss Mason; when they had gone through the blooming geometry of the garden to the river bank, strolling in groups of two and three; and when Rachel, stepping behind the others, straightened a spear of wild grass in front of her remarking upon its length, Halstead left Louise, and under pretext of cutting the stalk kneeled down at her feet.

"Commend me, — commend me!" he said.

"For what?" asked Rachel.

"Don't you see? For exemplary conduct. For politeness to your guest. If it is lost upon you I may as well, with your permission, walk with you. Don't you remember that I have not seen you for days?"

She thought again of the vinaigrette, and wondered if he gave to every one the same impression of eager preference. She lost herself in wondering, her color mounting, and Nathan waiting. Then, "Nothing that you do is lost upon me," she said. "You must go on."

And later, when they were all seated with summer informality upon the porch, and when Halstead with his guitar was walking up and down upon the pavement, singing, Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, to the air from Martha, and with the manner of Fra Diavolo singing in the inn, she wondered anew that she could ever have attainted him with suspicion of hollowness. All the world loved him and the great Jehovah smiled upon him.

*After the ladies had driven off Dayton went to his

room, where Halstead shortly followed him, carrying a long, green blade in his hand.

"What is that?" asked Dayton.

"Grass."

"So I inferred from the looks of it."

"Grass," repeated Halstead, putting it over a picture of a faded British General. "Grass as graceful as Miss Guerrin herself. She is a beautiful reed. She strikes you as something singularly pliable, yet you know that somewhere, you can't tell just where, you would find her wholly inflexible. I would like to go to the end of her favor to find where her rigor begins. You can't tell what a woman is like till you know her severities."

"It strikes me," said Dayton, "that you are following the line of her favor tolerably fast."

"Bah!" rejoined Halstead, "she fancies me in a way, if that is what you mean. I am a novelty to her. The best thing of the kind that she has seen. I am her opera, her charity ball, her coupé, her six-button gloves, her train, her white satin slippers, her servant, — things she has never had and would like, but not things necessary to her. I fill in her mind the place of those fashionable accessories. I am everything which she has missed, and which therefore she is curious about. I touch her inquisitiveness. These inquisitive people have no hearts. I tell you the girl is cold."

"You omit an item," said Dayton dryly.

"What?"

"You should say you were her opera, her slippers, her servant, her lover,—things she has never had but not things necessary to her."

Halstead hesitated a moment in indecision, then, "So I should," he frankly confessed.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do? Nothing. What can I do? It can't be,—you don't suppose"— He stopped as if his idea were inexpressible by ordinary methods; then stroked the ends of his mustache. "You are the most practical fellow that ever lived," he cried. "No, I have n't lost my wits *yet*. There is no chance of *that*. It is impossible."

"Why is it?" persisted Dayton sharply.

Halstead hesitated again, casting about in his mind for some one reason among the many. "We call ourselves poor," he said, at last.

"You have something from your father, and you have your position. For that matter I am going back to California and you can step into my place here."

"No more of that!" said Halstead with heat. "I owe you too much already. Imagine me marrying and sailing up to you with the orange blossoms on my arm, saying, 'Here we are! Help please. Two of us,—take us up tenderly!' Not if I know myself. When I marry I must see my way to all the comforts and some of the refinements of life without dependence on conditions. One should live in luxury with the woman one loves. Thanks to you all the same. This is the first I have heard of your going back to California."

"Nonsense," returned Dayton rising. "Beside most any one would think he could do the handsome thing on what you have; it is quite a fortune."

"My dear friend," said Halstead, his nostrils dilating, his expression growing keener, and his thoughts of Rachel fainter, "I am not most any one. I am a small minority. Most any one may do as he sees fit, — marry when he likes and as often as he likes; no doubt he is a very respectable and courageous person. I have no fault to find with him and no improvement to suggest. I am simply not he. We all know how your poor domestic devils live, — the meagre, wearing fashion of it. We see men every day putting their brides in cottages to wear themselves and their wedding dresses out. Is that the handsome thing you would have me do? I shrink before the very idea of a homely household belonging to me. I hate to see a woman poor. I hate even their pitiful economies. And to make one so, and to support her in a stingy way would be blight itself. She would repent it; they all do; and that fatigued, uninterested look I so abominate on women's faces would get into her eyes and streak her forehead. I simply could not endure it. You would see a notice in the 'Advertiser' some fine day, 'Found dead. In a barrel of Venetian red, one Nathan Halstead, M. E.' " He began in his turn to walk about the room, while Dayton with his back to the mantel-piece glowered upon him as if in his uncertain, fanciful pacing he might at any moment come too near.

"It makes all the difference in the world," the young man went on, "whether one faces the possible or the irrevocable,—the difference between a continent and a prison. The moment I knew I was bound I would want to get loose. I can't settle down and make an end of it yet. After thirty, perhaps, one loses one's hopes and vagaries and accepts without blindness what only the loss of his wits would induce him to accept in his youth. I'll wait for that dull period! It is coming; I feel it, but I have a year or two yet to run."

"And in the mean time what?" cried Dayton, with evident self-suppression. "Since when was the blinding passion so submissive to argument?"

"Since I left Paris," answered Halstead with a frown.

"That woman never cared for you," said Dayton, referring to some old confidence between them.

Halstead went over to the window and stood looking out for a few moments, then turned and came back. "I know what you are after," he said, "but you mistake. Neither does Rachel Guerrin care for me,—particularly. Let your mind rest easy."

"Ask her, and be done with it," Dayton demanded.

"And then? Suppose she does, what then?"

"If necessary you could wait a year or two"—

"Or three or four or five? That is another wretched piece of business. Think of being engaged through sixty moons to the beloved of your heart; holding her on one side till you were tired, then twisting her round

to the other, and whispering, ‘When I am rich, love, we will be married.’ No, brother. Neither have I come to that. What a strait-laced country it is,” he added. “ You no sooner observe that a young lady is pretty, than some one comes up and asks you what you are going to do about it. I am going to do nothing about it. I mean her no harm, you may be sure of that !”

“ No harm ! Good Lord, no harm ! He means her no harm ! ” and Dayton’s face curled up into such a sinister expression as left no trace of his usual self. His eyes, never large, grew smaller, and his inauspicious temper contracted his brows and drove the color from his lips. He did not look handsome against the black mantel-piece.

He took his hat and bolted out into the night air.

When he returned Halstead still sat moodily where he had left him. He seemed to have passed the time in unsatisfactory contemplation. He looked up at Dayton as he came in, but they separated for the night without wasting further words.

XI.

IT was several days before Halstead again saw Rachel save in the all-pervading presence of her friends and relatives. He watched her furtively and was always in her vicinity, but made no effort as formerly to talk with her alone. He frowned frequently and without reason. He avoided Dayton and was uneasy everywhere. He avoided Louise Mason as well, and no sooner decided upon one thing than he changed his mind and did another. He seemed suspicious, irresolute. He talked of going away, and yet he stayed. He meditated self-sacrifice, but sacrificed nobody.

Rachel did not know what to make of him, and waited as for the breaking of a fairer day. Meanwhile there came a letter for her from a great-aunt, — great, not only as regards propinquity, but as regards her position; her appointments, and her opinion of herself as well, and she wrote to invite her niece, whom she had not seen for ten years, to spend the rest of the season at her house. And yet the girl said she did not care to go. Rachel, whose highest pleasure it had been to go, ever since she was born! It was incredible, but was set down at once by her relatives on her mother's side to the strange perversity of the Guerrin mind. The Guerrins, although their name was misspelled in this country, were originally French, and were therefore

capable of — anything if you are English and your ancestors were ever missionaries to the Pokanokets !

“ Go ? ” said Rachel ; “ I would not care to go to paradise just now ! ”

That was certainly French. The Desboroughs had always wanted to go to paradise, and nothing but the divine will detained them. But what was it that could keep even a French girl from paradise ?

It was on the evening of the day they had gone down the road in fulfillment of the engagement made between Halstead and Miss Mason, that engagement having been postponed to await the arrival of the gentlemen from Boston. The party, reinforced by Messrs. Sterling and Meade, had gone down on a gravel car sent for that purpose, with Halstead in the cab in the post of engineer, and had spent several hours in conversation, in strolling, and in inspection of the difficult engineering feats which it had been their object to see. They were at the station waiting for the evening up-train, which was very late, and while waiting walked up and down the platform ; examined the placards on the walls, and read over and over again the advertisements of the Fall River Line, without which the scenery of the New England and Middle States would be unadorned. They discussed the rates to Omaha ; they balanced themselves on the rails, and in short indulged in the common pastimes incident to the situation and practiced by all intelligent travelers ; while a pair of glancing blue eyes belonging to a little figure in a calico dress surveyed them through a friendly aperture.

"What are you doing here, Margot?" asked Halstead, addressing it when the others were without.

"Nothing," she replied.

"Then you would better go home," he said. "It is getting late."

At nine o'clock the real business of waiting set in, and they seemed in a fair way to pay pretty dearly for their short diversion. Evidently the station was for the use of the workmen only, since not a house nor even a road was in sight. Everywhere rose the dark, overshadowing pines. Below them lay the river. To the right was a high and curving bridge for temporary use, while another half constructed struck obliquely across to the opposite mountain range. The cramped and narrow valley was full of fallen timbers, of huge abutment stones, of derricks, and of disabled cars, some of which were occupied by the families of the laborers.

Halstead was in a worse mood than ever. In fact his waiting, his self-restraint, and his principles were fast becoming insupportable to him, and while resolutely administering to Miss Mason's entertainment he was consumed by a desire to appease his spirit by talking with Rachel Guerrin, who was then leaning against a pile of ropes with Dayton by her side.

It grew later and later. It was unendurable. When the night, in his opinion, was far spent, and jocund day might at any moment have been expected upon the mountain-tops, it happened that the various little zoteries broke up and that Rachel for a moment stood alone upon the platform.

Halstead immediately crossed over to her. "Can nothing ruffle you?" he said, half smiling, half frowning. "You are too amiable, — too easily pleased. You can never be more than happy you know, and it is simple to be filled with it because the night happens to be mild and because all these people who ought to be at home are dancing around you. Be discontented like me! Be rapacious, — be irritable!"

"What is the matter?" said Rachel. "What *has* been the matter?"

"Come," said Halstead, "tell me what Dayton has been saying to you to make the time fly."

"He told me," returned the girl, "that the ropes we leaned upon were from Yucatan, from a town called Merida, — was it?"

"Zounds! Was he so sentimental as that?"

"He is never sentimental," said Rachel.

"You think him prosy, do you?"

"Well, no, not prosy."

"What then?"

"I don't know. Must one be either sentimental or prosy?"

"Matter-of-fact, perhaps."

"He is certainly matter-of-fact."

"What else?"

"I don't know him very well."

"Not as well as you do me?"

"No."

"He has been here as long as I."

"That is nothing," she assured him.

"Perhaps," said Halstead, "you would take my arm. We might walk a little before morning. I have been wanting to see you to restore me. Say something to me, can't you? Pacify me, make me glad."

"I? How can I?" she asked, beginning to walk with him along the platform.

From this lonely staging high up on the steep mountain side even the attentive stars looked strange.

"I am out of patience, out of spirits, out of sorts, out of conceit, out of my head, out of tune, — out generally," the young man went on capriciously, as if carrying the thoughts of an old mood into a new and happier temper.

"I thought that with you those things were always at home," said Rachel.

"Come, be serious."

"I don't know when to be serious with you; you never seem to be."

"What do you mean by sentimental?" continued Halstead. "What is it that I am and Dayton is not?"

"I did not say that you were that."

"No, but you think it all the same. In fact you are quite right. What is it to be sentimental? Is it to be a trifle maudlin in one's ideas."

"That depends upon how you use it."

"Well how do *you* use it?"

"Not that way."

"Is it to be hampered with impotent sensibilities? Here in America a man should have no more ideas

than he can promptly make use of in a practical career."

"Oh, yes, he should. The more the better."

"They fetter him you see. They make a weakling of him. They interfere with action."

"They make him interesting," added his companion.

Halstead paused a moment. Then, "I have an idea," he said, "that Dayton has a fancy for you himself."

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Rachel.

"I suspect that he would like to monopolize you. That if you would knock he would let you in. I imagine that even now, while he commits himself about the cables yonder, he is pondering your eyebrows. Jove! I would n't say what he was n't pondering."

"You shall not say such a thing," cried the girl, her face growing slowly red.

"He would like to let himself go," declared Halstead. "He would like to fall in love with you."

"You have no right" — she began; but she was unable to say further what his infringement was. Her indignation was lost in thoughts fast following, and stopping, she half withdrew her hand from his arm.

Halstead, raising his own arrested it. "Wait a moment," he said, and going on a few steps farther into the deeper and less populous darkness he stopped beside the pile of ropes, while his thoughts, his prospects, his desires, and all the wandering tendrils of his being coiled about the spot more closely than the cables. "He would like to monopolize you," he persisted, still

holding her unwilling fingers. "And he would like to see me in Jericho. This is my opportunity. I should go to Jericho. But I don't do it. It is a case where sentiment prevents action. You wanted an illustration."

"Oh," said Rachel, changing color again, "you were illustrating, were you? It is too absurd!"

"But if it were so?" persisted the young man.

"I should think that your going would be more sentimental than staying. What difference would it make?"

"None, if you say it would make none."

"Of course, it would make none," she answered, withdrawing her hand.

"Then I need n't go."

"Is that what you have been thinking of?" she asked. "You are too good. I thought," — but she did n't say what she thought. She laughed a little instead. "You are sentimental truly," she added. "Is that all that has made you out of sorts?"

"No," said Halstead, looking down at the fog forming over the river, "I have been more sentimental even than that. I have had a fit of self-disgust, and a longing for something better, — that is the height of sentiment, is n't it? It sounds almost maudlin when you read it in the books. I have a desire for respectability and substance. I would like to define myself by a definite position and belongings like those of other men; to rate my capacity by what I can do; to plod along; to be contented; to form ties; to be

practical. I have run around till I have had a surfeit of impressions, — till I am covered with them. I am like an old-clothes shop in the East hung with the vivid rags and heroic tatters of all manner of people. I would like to throw them off, whitewash the native structure, and begin again. What would you think of such a project ? ”

“ I ? ” said Rachel, “ I can only say, ‘ Ah ! ah ! ’ as people do to what is strange to them.”

“ It is you who urge me to it.”

“ I urge you to nothing. Your disgust is new. Your longing is new. I doubt if they will ever be old.”

“ You are beautiful,” said Halstead ; “ that urges me ! You rob the common lot of its forbidding commonplaceness ; that urges me ! You don’t know your capacity. I want you to exert it ; to do your utmost, — to push me to extremes ; to hurry me headlong. I will submit to your influence like a man.”

“ However you begin,” returned Rachel, flushing again, “ the end is the same, — some pretty speech, like a strain blown up a hill. I may like them, but I don’t like myself so well for liking them.”

“ What is that but urging me ? ” exclaimed Halstead. “ That is very strenuous. You will bring the truth to a point where belief is inevitable.”

“ I have no wish to push you to extremes,” she went on with vehement denial. “ If you want to be practical, be practical ; if you want to begin anew, begin anew ; but don’t assume that I have an influence which I have not, or that I would wish to use it if I had it.”

A dingy lamp placed in a dingy window made a line of lighter shade across the platform where Dayton was promenading with Mrs. Sterling, and Halstead unconsciously waited till they were near the farthest limit of their route; then, "You look about you," he said, "with such avidity that one wants to respond to your inquiring glance with all that he knows and is. If I have responded more fervently than pleases you, and added to what I know and am a little that I feel and hope to be, you have only your eye-beam to blame. It offers to look into one and to take one at one's best. I thought if I showed you all it would be only too little. You seem to be looking for some ideal entertainment, for some sublimated sentiment, for something that should justify the candle, and I would simply contribute myself whole to help you find it. It seems that I can be of no considerable use."

The inquiring eye-beam was fixed upon him then if never before,—upon his eager expression and his facile mouth. "When I think the entertainment has come," she said with agitation, "and that I am in the midst of it, you smile and tell me there is no such thing."

"We might find it together," he answered ardently.

From a distance there came the shrill whistle of a locomotive and the rushing sound of a train. A man came out of the station with a lantern which he swung violently to and fro. Then the head-light threw its clear, full glare upon them and the coils of various sorts about them. It affected Halstead like the brill-

iant, perspicacious stare of the critical world, and frowning like one who had been surprised in a rhapsody he went forward saying, "Here we are at last!"

Meanwhile Louise Mason, murmuring something about the dampness, had gone within where she presently became aware that she was not alone.

The one smoky lamp but faintly illumined the barren interior, but the four walls designed to sepulchre such unfortunates as were obliged to do their waiting there offered few facilities for concealment; and going over toward the door she descried in one corner, behind the counter and sitting curled up against the window, the slim girl who had made them the object of her slanting observation earlier in the evening.

She was apparently indulging in silent and solitary state some dim idea of intercourse with the gifted company in whose midst she had hidden her easily-hidden self. She sat with her head against the wall, but from time to time leaned forward and looked out upon the high society on the platform, and seemed to find rare but melancholy entertainment in the spectacle of their light pedestrianism in the heart of the region where she called herself at home. No shuffling of heavy feet, no swinging of over-long arms, no ungainly slouching across the boards, such as she was used to seeing there, but the easy, graceful strolling of the class that promenades! She did not seem to mind the presence of Louise or to take the slightest account of herself as a waif in a strange position.

"Do you belong here?" asked Louise, accosting her.

"No. I came up to see," answered the girl.

"To see what?"

"You and all."

"Where did you come from?"

"Down there," and she nodded toward the valley.

"Won't your family miss you? It is nearly mid-night."

"I have n't any family, only father."

"Won't he miss you?"

"No."

"Did you come over on the bridge?"

"Yes 'm."

Thus disturbed Margot got down from her seat and stood with her hands behind her back absorbed in the contemplation of Miss Mason's elegance, and as unaware as ever of her own singular person. Her person was probably never much noticed, and she shared in the common opinion of its unworthiness. She was small and thin. Her cheek bones were high. There were freckles over her nose; and her eyes were drawn down at the corners as if they had been imported from Tartary generations back. Her hair, which was light and thin, was parted evenly and braided in a tight, circumspect braid, which ended happily in a bit of ribbon almost new. She wore a dark cotton dress and her feet were bare.

Halstead had looked at her feet one day, when he was standing near the station talking with Hodson, the contractor. Hodson was telling him an anecdote. Hodson told remarkable anecdotes, with a jovial laugh

and his thumbs under his arms. In the course of the story Halstead observed, with partial consciousness and inattentive sense, a pair of brown and shapely feet standing near, like the extremities of some half-sized statue exhumed from the statue-cumbered soil of Greece; and when the anecdote was finished and the laugh over, he raised an artistic eye to cover the rest of the relic, but found it protected from observation by a drapery of brown and spotted calico. It was not from Greece, but its pose was admirable. It was watching him. It was strangely self-oblivious. Presently it turned away and was lost among the firs.

She bent some such look now upon Miss Mason's well-moulded figure and complex costume.

"Are you his folks?" she presently asked.

"Whose folks?" inquired Louise.

"His,—the engineer's?"

"Mr. Dayton's?"

"No,—the other."

"Yes."

"Has he always lived among such as you?" And she surveyed the costume once more. "He showed me how to make them things," she added presently, pointing to a shelf behind the counter on which were ranged some rough figures fashioned in clay. "I make 'em and he looks at 'em when he comes up here noons."

"How long have you been at it?" asked Louise.

"Most ever since we came. He spoiled some once and paid me for 'em; then he took his hat off, bowed

and laughed and went away. Those are his. He is very kind."

"He is always kind," said Louise, "very kind, and if you die of it, it is your own fault."

"When he goes away does he go where you are?"

Louise went over and took her by the hand. "You should go home," she said, very gently for Louise.

Presently the girl started and slipped out a side door behind the counter, and then the train came puffing in.

When it had gone on she came back in front of the station and looked after it until even the sound no longer reached her. Then she started off across the bridge, the fog creeping up about her feet, obscuring the depths below.

XII.

"NATHAN," said Mrs. Sterling, a few days later, "what are you saying to Rachel Guerrin?"

"You can't accuse me of saying much of anything to her within forty-eight hours," replied that young gentleman, with an effort at indifference. "Neither Dayton nor I came up last night."

"You hover about her in a way that can't be mistaken," continued his sister. "I have seen you do it too often."

"So do you. So does Dayton. So does every one."

"I suspect you of cultivating a little tenderness in that quarter," she went on, not noticing his irrelevant suggestion.

Halstead pulled his hat down over his eyes, perhaps to cover a frown, and held his head higher than ever. "Given Rachel Guerrin, an endless summer, and the little naked god that goes everywhere unbidden, and what else could you expect?" he inquired.

"She is too pretty," said Mrs. Sterling, warningly.

"She is very pretty," assented Nathan, chafing.

"She is not insensible."

"To what?"

"To you."

"What are you trying to get at?" he cried with irritation.

"It can't be,—surely you are not serious."

"No!" shouted Halstead.

They went on a few minutes in silence.

"Why should n't I be?" he asked indifferently again. "I hate the fashion of coolly weighing such a point."

"She is too simple,—too—too agricultural," responded Mrs. Sterling with a fine, discriminating smile which expanded her nostrils.

"She is neither,—superlatively," answered the young man.

"Mother would be horrified," observed his sister, with a look which reminded him of the stare of the locomotive two evenings previous.

"It would n't be the first time."

"You refer to my marriage. But she did n't send me to Paris. She did n't expect anything brilliant of *me*. Your wife must be the flower of creation; an exceedingly tall and brilliant flower. And she must have money and influence at her back."

"No matter what she expects."

"You forget Louise."

"Excuse me, I don't forget her," answered Halstead coldly.

This fragment of conversation was on the mountain back of Mrs. Anderson's house whither the friends of our acquaintance had gone,—that mild effort at mountaineering being all that the weather and the limited time of the engineers would permit.

It was toward the close of a July day, and scarcely

a leaf stirred in the woods through which they passed. The circuitous road by which they ascended was one used for getting out timber in winter, was carpeted with the softest green, and shaded by pines and birches, and led them by a gradual inclination to the wood-choppers' camp upon the summit. In fact the mountain, as it was called, hardly deserved that special distinction, as it was merely the centre of a group of taller fellows that rose above it in all directions, and on top it expanded in a waste of wild and rugged country made picturesque by gigantic rocks and a small, clear lake supplied by hidden springs.

That evening when Mr. Sterling, with Rachel already in the carriage, had driven to the depot for the engineers, in pursuance of his wife's scheme for a picnic, Dayton had entered at once, oblivious of his former abhorrence of that pastime; while Halstead, with his hand on the carriage door, had looked about him as if in search of some supernatural interposition. Finding none, however, and meeting Rachel's smile, he too entered. But while he counterfeited his usual spirits, and lent himself indiscriminately among his friends on the way up the mountain, he still remained at heart uneasy, irresolute, rapacious.

"And this is it?" he exclaimed, appealing to Rachel when they paused upon the shore of the melancholy lake. "This is it; the place where unfortunate Beaudeckers come! How many annually? It is very convenient. Why did n't you bring us here sooner? We have lived longer than necessary within reach of such advantages."

"You are still willfully wasting breath," said Mr Sterling. But Mr. Sterling was one of those to whom Nathan's existence was not a necessity.

"Oh," said Halstead lightly. "I make no leaps. If ever there was a temporizer I am one."

"It is beautiful," said Louise, "quite like Switzerland! But it is melancholy, is n't it? Was there ever a suicide here?"

"Never," said Rachel, smiling. "Mr. Halstead will be the first."

"Not he," said Louise.

A crane upon the farther shore stalked away; and some wild ducks swimming in the shadows rose in alarm, and, flapping their wings upon the dusky air, went swiftly in search of more desolate pools, their shapes as long and linear as if they flew on a Japanese screen.

"Come," said Mrs. Sterling, "let us have our supper. There is no time to lose." The Anderson boys, who carried the commissary stores, were already building a fire and unpacking the baskets; and she turned to their assistance, followed by several of the party.

Mr. Meade and Margaret Duncan, however, pursued the path a short distance along the margin of the lake. Mr. Meade was the gentleman to whom Miss Duncan was engaged, and although he was as homely as if Thomas Nast had made him and presented him to his parents, she highly approved him even to the plainness of his visage and the gentle slope of his narrow shoulders. He was about forty years of age, and a

partner in a wholesale establishment for the sale of silks. After telling that a man is from Boston one is heartily sorry to add that he sells silks ; but some one has to sell silks, even in that metropolis, and Mr. Meade was unfortunately selected to follow that calling. Doubtless if he had not become engrossed with gros grains at an early age he might have developed into a professor of the South Sea languages, or might have lectured upon ethics at Tremont Temple ; but having fallen when a mere boy from this high, though common, destiny into the silk trade, there he remained, and at the end of twenty-five years considered himself financially compensated for his intellectual abasement. There, too, Margaret agreed with him, and kindly consented to share his fortune while maintaining her own high scholarship. She read Herbert Spencer, but acknowledged that even a fine mind might be more at home in a lower atmosphere, like that surrounding her worthy lover.

Halstead retailed these facts to Rachel, detaining her upon the rocks for that purpose.

“They have been engaged,” he added, with amiable ridicule, “for seven years.”

“So long as that ?” said Rachel.

“Well, thereabouts.”

“It is n’t possible !” disclaimed the girl.

“Not possible ? Why not ? Why should n’t two persons who love each other be engaged for seven years, or for seven times seven years ? Don’t you think it indicates great sincerity and great — warmth ?”

"I don't know," said Rachel looking after them.

"Perhaps you wonder that they did n't break it off long ago."

"Oh, no, not that."

"That is the usual way."

"I don't believe it," she declared, smiling incredulously.

"I am afraid," he went on in a light but caressing tone, "that you don't know much about that rich and varied association that admits of many repetitions, of many repairs and breakages; which is made up of heart-burnings, smiles, pangs, festivities, and a good-by, love, we part never to meet again."

"I am afraid I don't," assented Rachel, feeling in her heart a delicious freshness of susceptibility.

"Pshaw!" pursued Halstead, still in the same gentle and mocking vein. "At your age you should have had more experience. You should be sharper, more world-hardened. You should powder; you should have a box or two of sweet-scented letters laid away. You should sigh and tap your fan; and you should have a few cynicisms to air occasionally."

"I might attain those perfections," she said lightly; "they seem easy."

"Then I would understand you. I would be used to you. I would know what to do," he cried. "As it is I am afraid of you."

The fire which the boys had made roared and crackled, sending thousands of spruce needles toward the zenith in an ecstasy of flame; and Joe Anderson

was dispatched to the bank to summon the parties there to the repast then ready.

"I have n't seen anything to equal this since I left the army," said Mr. Sterling, as they gathered about the table. "It reminds me of some nights in the Cumberlands,—the heat-lightning and all. The air is full of it. When we went down"— He paused, raised his flexible, quizzing eyebrows, and looked at his wife.

"Go on," she said, "our friends are lenient, and I am used to it."

"She don't permit it," he explained, shaking his head. "I know better."

"Those stories once begun, last a day and a night, you know," returned his wife. "If you will kindly abbreviate."

"I have abbreviated," he replied. "Where are your sandwiches?"

Mr. Sterling was tall, slow-stepping, robust. "He was a lawyer, able and successful, not because he was particularly astute, but because he was large-hearted and jovial, and difficulties seemed to resolve themselves into justice, or into nothingness, in passing through his mind. Socially he aided and abetted his wife; indeed he aided and abetted everybody. In his presence no uneasy gaps yawned in the conversation; and if, on the present occasion, Halstead lay in comparative silence, watching the almost impalpable agitation of the lake, it made much less difference in the general tone than might be expected.

When the supper was over and the cigars finished, the confused preparations for descent at once began. The fire died away. The heat-lightning played more and more brightly, and the ghosts of departed Narragansetts gathered around the encampment.

The boys started down. Mr. Meade and Margaret Duncan started down. The delicious evening was almost over. The summer lightning flashed across the pool. It was growing dark. It was growing rapidly dark, and clouds were scudding across the sky.

Rachel stooped to pick up her alpine stock, and when she rose Halstead was standing by her side. He pushed back some faintly-pungent spruce boughs and took a few steps forward. "Where is your hat?" he asked, halting, and barring the path.

"In the wood-chopper's hut."

"In the hut?" he repeated.

"We will get it on the way."

"On the way," he echoed, absently. "Have you everything else?" She assured him she had everything else, but he did not move. He stood looking about him in a dazed sort of fashion, while the sound of voices and retreating footsteps grew fainter and fainter. A wind sprang up somewhere from the treasury of winds, and the trees upon the shore waved in the solitude.

"There will be a storm," he observed mechanically, after a time. And then the silence closed about them. The voices and the footsteps were gone.

"It is coming fast," said the girl in the same accents.

"How it lightens," he exclaimed with a white face.
And a flash broke over them.

"Rachel," he cried, in the tone he would have used
had he sworn he could not live without her. "Do
you like to see it lighten?"

All about them were the branches of a fallen spruce,
and she leaned against one of them as if for support.
They were alone upon the mountain.

"Rachel," he whispered, "Rachel!" And still he
did not look at her. He seemed to be gathering pas-
sion from the vivid light.

"To whit! to who!" screamed a distant owl.

Rachel's heart-beats were almost audible. They
seemed to be again at the station near the coil of ropes,
and she began to tremble as at the sequel of that time.
The wind died away. The desert came near to listen.
It was strangely still. It continued strangely still.

Halstead began to walk up and down the path as if
to bring his thoughts to the relief of his agitation.

"Rachel!" he cried again, "this is a grand mount-
ain. Do you like the lightning? Does it meander
through your veins? It will be a grand storm,—will
you like to watch it with me?"

Blindly she picked up her stick which had fallen
from her hand.

"Don't go, Rachel," he said, his head held high, his
forehead frowning, his white lips smiling. "Let us
stay, Rachel."

She started forward but he threw himself in her
way, prone upon the ground, murmuring words unin-

telligible to her ears. She did not stay to comfort him. She grew paler, and suddenly darted down the path.

Presently he shook himself, rose, got her hat, and started down the road, wondering that she should have flown so rapidly. Then he broke into a run, and still he did not overtake her. He thought of calling her, but the rest of the party, now not far in advance, would hear him, and he would hate that. It would make a beastly racket. In a moment a streak of lightning revealed the hurrying company of his friends, but no Rachel Guerrin, and turning he ran up the mountain as rapidly as he had run down. It could not be helped, so he began to halloo in very different accents from those he employed among the spruce branches, but the rising wind derided his feeble shouts. He was at his wit's end when he heard an answer coming from down the mountain. He rushed for the ox-path again, and a few minutes later a hand was laid upon him, and Dayton sharply inquired what had become of Miss Guerrin.

He sharply replied that that was what he was trying to find out. That she had started down before him, and had he, Dayton, seen anything of her?

The party ahead had heard his hallooing. "Something may have happened," said Mrs. Sterling; "do please somebody see about it," — and Dayton, pleasing, was already gone.

He looked closely at Halstead for a moment when he heard his reply, then turning on his heel, struck

into the woods, taking an oblique direction downward, and making his way among the bending trees and along the uncertain ground till he came out upon some cleared sheep lands, dotted with rocks and extending far and wide. It did him good to shout. He had no scruples against a beastly racket.

In a little while he struck a path which he began to ascend, the summer lightning playing in white sheets about him, and flashing over the blown and desolate pastures ; and shortly at a distance he saw a figure moving.

"Is that you, Mr. Dayton ?" asked Rachel, as he came up.

He noted an excitement which was not fear in her manner, and looking past her across the valley he seemed to observe there the same peculiarity in nature which King David recorded long ago in the words : "Why hop ye so, ye high hills ?" or "What ails ye, ye mountains that ye skip like rams ; and ye little hills like lambs ?"

"Do you know just where we are ?" he asked.

"Not exactly. I started wrong."

"It will be safe enough to go down by this path, I take it," he observed practically. "It can't take us far out of our course. Can you follow ?"

Near the lower border of the pasture there was an old and empty sheep-fold and toward this he directed their hurrying steps, but before they reached it the rain began to fall.

"This is too poor a place for you," he said, "but it is better than the inhospitality outside."

He threw down some corn stalks for her to sit upon, then went back and walked up and down in the rain, like a picket guarding the entrance way.

Presently Rachel came out and touched him lightly on the arm. "I must insist upon going home," she said. "I am no more afraid of the rain than you. What I object to is keeping dry while the drops drizzle off your hat. Let us go on."

"Oh, I am comfortable," he answered. "I am divinely comfortable. I have n't been so comfortable for weeks. My discomforts are not of the weather. I am very tough."

"So am I, and I am going."

"You cannot very well, alone," he said, drawing her back under the roof. Then, muttering something about finding the path, he disappeared.

When he returned the clouds had broken, the rain had ceased, and the lights of the house were visible not far away.

They descended the intervening fields, passed through an old sugar-camp, whose troughs stood full of water, struck the road, and had nearly reached Mrs. Anderson's when a man rose from somewhere near the gate. He was not a pleasant object as he came slouching near ; but, recognizing Dayton, he stopped irresolutely and took off his hat. He was an immense fellow in stature, lank, angular, and with a beard like a Norseman.

"Well, Braut," said Dayton, "what can I do for you ?"

"I ain't got nothing agin *you*" said the man suddenly, putting on his hat again, and looking vaguely and uneasily about him.

"I know you are in trouble," said Dayton. "What can I do for you? I heard you left to-day."

"Yes, sir. I can't stay no longer. I wanted to see them as saw her last. Mebbe the lady, sir, was one of them?"

"I?" said Rachel, thus strangely appealed to.

"I had a daughter," the man went on, a little wildly, "the same that made the figgers. She war n't much bigger nor they, an' when I left she war as cold. She war drownded, in the river there."

"I heard of it to-day," said Rachel, recalling a rumor that had floated to the village from the lower station. "I was very sorry for her."

"I war a youngster," the man rambled on, "when she war born, an' I allus took her round with me. I had nowheres to leave her, an' she war a quiet little thing, — quiet till that fellow got to showin' her about them figgers, and then there warn't any more quietness in her. She went in an' out, an' in an' out, an' them sparks came in her eyes, an' she put a ribbin in her hair. An' I keep a thinkin' mebbe she did n't drownd quite accidental like. Nobody knows, unless it's some of you. It war in the night, an' she'd been over the bridge to look at you. I war sleepin' heavy as if she could take care of herself like a water-rat an' she war drownding. There warn't no harm in her, an' I could a't rightly find that there war harm in him, but when

he came smiling round she war taken with him. **As I** might a' knowed. An' is he here?" he added, a sullen fire breaking through his grief.

"No, he is n't here," answered Dayton.

"I don't wish him no luck," cried the man, pulling at his sandy beard, and again looking vaguely and uneasily about him.

"Look here, Braut," said Dayton steadily, "I'll answer for him. He would no more do harm to you or yours than I would. If he has done it he does not know it. He would not mean it. He intended to do good. It is his misfortune to be too clever."

"I don't wish him no luck," repeated the fellow doggedly. "There ain't no such innocence. He meddled with what war nothin' to him. He'd 'a been in better business to 'a let her be. I ain't got nothin ag'in you, sir, but I don't wish him no luck."

Dayton drew Rachel toward the gate which he closed behind her; and then he went back where the fellow still stood shaking his head menacingly and with a vague desire to avenge upon some one the calamity which had befallen him.

She went mechanically to the house, and when she looked back they had disappeared.

Presently Halstead came wandering in from the regions back on the mountains, and her explanations had to be gone over again. He seemed in no degree surprised to find her already there.

"I have felt all the time that I was floundering about without the shadow of a chance," he replied,

unable wholly to suppress his discomfiture. "When Dayton starts off like that he gets what he goes for. I saw him do it once before when there was a strike on the road ; and when he came back he brought three hundred men. Did he pick you up on a fork of lightning ?"

"I don't know how he did it," said Rachel, "but here I am."

"And where is he ?"

"There was a man at the gate," said Rachel briefly. "He stopped to speak to him."

"He was a terrible looking fellow," said Mrs. Sterling ; "he was here a few minutes ago asking for you ?"

"For me ?"

"He looked like a tramp. I think he had been drinking. He wouldn't tell what he wanted. I thought he would never go, but suddenly away he bolted."

"He said his name was Braut," said Mr. Sterling,—"probably one of the road hands."

"Braut ?" repeated Halstead. "Braut, was it ? He probably wanted help. I hope Dayton will do something for him."

"Who is he ?" inquired his sister.

"One of the hands down at the bridge. It is a very sad case. He stuck his shovel in the ground to-day and left for parts unknown. They lived in one of the freight-cars you saw down there, he and his daughter, who was drowned a day or two ago. They say he took her loss hard."

"I saw her," cried Louise, suddenly starting up.

"You! When?" exclaimed Halstead.

"The night we were down there. Just before we came home."

Halstead instinctively raised his head as if he had been unjustly accused. "Is that so?" he said. "What was she doing?"

"Nothing."

"What did she say?"

"She showed me some images she had made," said Louise, concisely.

"Her bucket of clay is drying up," said Halstead calmly, as one who would freely tell all he knew. "She was the kind of a waif you read about but never see in this country,—an artistic waif,—artistic, plastic, tragic. I saw her when I first went down there dabbling in a clay bank with a plaster Holy Mother in her hand. Think of a poor, plain, and arid little being such as she with vague reachings out toward art as if she would climb by it! And she did n't even know its name! Art? she said. What is art? I could n't tell her, but I gave her some suggestions about her models. I am sorry for her father. They say he takes her loss hard. I hope Dayton will do something for him. I believe I'll go and find them."

For him the subject of Margot was closed. He had nothing to reproach himself with. He had been very scrupulous.

As he started out, Rachel ran after him. "Don't go," she said excitedly; "please don't go. You can

do no good. It will only make it worse. He was n't looking for you for any good"—

Nathan straightened himself and looked down upon her.

"Now, I *must* go," he said. "Do you think me a coward, or what do you think me?"

She gazed after him a moment as he went down the path, with his confident erectness, and his irreproachable rectitude, then turning, went back into the hall.

Mrs. Sterling, who was bustling about to restore the comfort of their shattered party, bethought herself of Rachel's wet feet and drabbled skirts. "You must go to my room right away, my dear, and dry them," she said, "while I have another fire made down here. I never allow anybody about me to take cold. I never have a cold myself. It is because I avoid draughts and dampness. And your shoes are thin, too. You wear very pretty shoes, my dear. My room is on the right. Louise and Margaret are both there. Louise just went up."

Rachel, nothing loath, went up-stairs, but Louise and Margaret were not there. There was no one there, and instead of going to the freshly kindled fire she sat down on a stool near the window and buried her face in her hands. She felt crushed, humiliated, she scarcely knew why; and there was a cessation in her desire for worldly experience. She seemed benumbed. She could not cry. She could not think.

She took no note of time, but presently her hands were quietly removed and Louise stood before her, tall

and fair, but with something fierce in the place of her former languor.

"And you, too!" she said, with a sort of light scorn. "Oh, we all listen, and we all bury our faces in our hands like that. You are only one. I do it, that little Braut ghost did it, and now you. You are only one. We are of all classes and conditions. And your hands don't cover any more happiness than ours. He is complicated, you know,—complicated. He has no simplicity of heart, no singleness of mind. He wants and he does not want. He holds loosely. He woos idly. But I hope you don't think there is any evil in him? He is fine, refined, superfine. Nothing would induce him to be other than a gentleman. You need never fear that. You are not hiding your face because you, for one moment, suspect him, but because you yourself are disappointed, shabbily, miserably disappointed."

"Yes," said Rachel, allowing her passive hands to be held by the older woman, "I believe I am disappointed."

"I knew you would be when we left you on the mountain," pursued Louise. "All your pleasant ways for weeks have led to the supreme, the critical moment; and when, to-night, you reached it, it was still and dry. He may love you in his way, but he will never ask you to marry him. It is n't in him. He is n't made of that simple stuff. If you are wise you will take your hands down and never put them up again on Nathan Halstead's account. The raptures of that fine young man are as fluent as his phrases. Come, what did he do? What did he say to you?"

"I don't know," she answered helplessly; then she caught something of the light scorn of her companion and added, "He said something touching to my shoe buttons."

"Oh, there are hopes of you," cried Louise, half wrapping herself in the scant chintz curtains and leaning her head against the casement. "You are not taking it so seriously as I supposed; not so seriously as I did. Did you wonder why I came here? You know now. You may as well know. I don't tell you because I expect you to make any concessions to me. I expect you to do your best for yourself, but your best won't be good enough. It won't interfere with me. I don't expect him to love me, but, my child, I have hundreds of thousands of dollars. He thinks now that he does not care for money, but I don't believe it. I keep mine before him and it has its effect. I can see that it has its effect. He is prudent, prudent, prudent. His prudence is deepest of all. He is a rich man now. He acts and feels like a rich man; and the fact that the money belongs to me gives him none the less sublime a sense of unobtrusive wealth. Do you think all this hideous? Perhaps it is. I don't know why I tell you, but you seemed so secure; as if no one had been before you and no one would come after. I have been before you and I will come after you. He has but one rose-bush for us all, and he lets us sit by it in happy summer rotation, while he treats us like a priest and talks to us like a lover; but when it comes to marriage, it won't depend

upon the lengths of our eyelashes or the outlines of our chins. You are pretty. It has been terrible to me to see how pretty you were, but for all that you can be unhappy. If I did not love him I would hate him, but I love him and I can't change. I have only one idea. I never had but one. Most of my life I had n't any. If you have one I advise you to get rid of it. This is no place for fixed ideas. They grow tedious as mine is tedious. Heavens how tedious it is. I myself seem tedious. Everything is tedious, tedious, when one waits."

Louise leaned out the window as if she would find relief in the cooling rain, and for the moment seemed to have forgotten in her own vehemence the more moderate infelicities of the younger girl.

"Does he know it?" asked the latter with solicitude.

"Know it!" said Louise. "He could repeat it word for word. He has it set to music. I have heard him humming it."

"What are you trying to do?" cried Rachel. "To put him in a shape that no one would look at? How do you know that all you have been saying is true? Do you suppose he means nothing that he says, and that he makes up the manners and the very tones of feeling? We overreach our mark and accuse him of what nobody could do. We might at least have the grace to wait. We call ourselves his friends, yet hear us! Hear his friends!"

"I am sure he means what he says,—to your shoe-buttons," answered Louise. "Perhaps he swore by them. He may have said, By thy buttons I love thee."

Rachel had no response. She looked for a moment out the window. There were two figures coming up the walk. "It seems to me," she said, "that those who abhor him might praise him more."

"And did you think him perfect?" asked Louise in pity of such inexperience.

"I thought him charming," said Rachel. "I am not sure I thought him anything else."

"He is nothing else, but that is too considerable. What else? Your needs must be very great. If he were but half as charming only one of us need sicken for him."

"Do I look sick?" inquired the younger girl lifting her face.

Louise rose and turned up the light. "You look bright,—over-bright about the eyes," she said. "Your symptoms are very bad."

"They will lead to nothing,—like signs in dry weather," returned Rachel. She rose and smoothed her hair as if to descend; but the disorder of the evening was not to be at once subdued.

"And your wet feet!" said Louise! They had forgotten all about her feet except as the salient at which Halstead had thrown himself down.

"It makes no difference," she replied; "we must go home." And she began once more to repair her toilet.

Louise wrapped a blue shawl about her and stood back a step. "You don't look just right yet," she said, "not as if we had been talking about preventives for colds. Can't you put on a little dullness?" And bend-

ing over she kissed her, adding, "That is for dullness!"

At the door Rachel stopped and turned. "I can't help feeling," she said, "that you will have use for your fortune."

"But when! but when!" returned Louise. "Please say that I won't be down again to-night. Say I am not well, — say anything you choose except the truth."

Halstead and Dayton were both in the parlor, and both of them wet and silent. The neat and chilly fire-board had been taken out, and some pine sticks burned cheerfully upon the hearth; but, though everything had been done for their delectation, it seemed impossible to restore the broken harmony of the evening, at least as far as concerned these gentlemen. When Rachel came in with her wraps on they both immediately got their hats.

"Come and let us look at you, my dear," said Mrs. Sterling. "Where is Louise?"

"She is not feeling well," Rachel answered.

"Are you quite sure that you are?" inquired that lady looking at her critically.

"I am always feeling well," she declared.

"It is raining a little again," said Margaret. "I wonder where the umbrellas are! You will want one to go to the carriage."

"Umbrellas, dear Margaret, are always a source of wonder," remarked Nathan from the mantel-piece.

XIII.

IT was about this time that there was a meeting in Boston of the directors and bondholders of this great railway, which was so largely to enhance the prosperity of New England, when Nathan Halstead, who waited upon them to submit some reports, rather distinguished himself. The office in which the meeting was held was a crimson and oak apartment, on a scale of magnificence everywhere demanded by the truly railroad mind; and there were present about a score of the very large and very small men, who by some strange correlation seem best fitted to conduct the very large railroad schemes made public, and the very fine railroad schemes kept private. There was the tall and portly gentleman who seemed to have grown big with his own extraordinary projects, whose idea of true greatness involved the handling of millions upon millions, whose family lived upon a Parisian boulevard and who frequently went across himself; and there was the small, lean banker, grown thin with shrewdness, who frequently coughed behind a first mortgage trust deed, and of whom there was not much left but assets. There was the dignitary who had influence with senators, who carried members of the House in his wallet, and who of late years had found it difficult to cross his legs; and there was the sharp and meagre rail-road king who was always urging that abstruse

operation, to which is given the salubrious name of watering. They were all men of substance and of high, high standards, particularly as regards the great subjects of personality and realty, and as such Halstead regarded them with deep respect,— respect enhanced by the confidence reposed in his own discretion.

He did not think that he himself was destined ever to become that golden object, a moneyed man. “I have no grasp,” he said. “I have no grasp,” — and for the moment his regret was tempered by this snug discovery of what he lacked, — but it pleased him to see how money was made in splendid sums ; how transmitted, and how retained in quantities that told upon the stock exchange. He liked to sit in a crimson chair among railway grandes, and look down upon the noisy street with its throng of citizens, each hurrying to reach some one of the thousand doors through which the flying hours escape, — half-attentive to what went on within the room, half to what went on without, and half to his own reflections (he had more halves than most men, had Nathan Halstead), but it chanced on this occasion that his own affairs were by far the most engrossing.

The night was warm, the business dry. His mind had entirely gone, both from the scenes without and within ; his study had assumed the hue called brown, and his attention was fixed upon the conflict now almost chronic in the arena of his bosom, when one of the rotund gentlemen called upon him in a familiar way to send some telegrams on behalf of the company.

He rose with a promptness, rather physical than mental, crossed the crimson floor, stepped into the hall, closed the oaken door behind him, turned the key, and dropping it into his unconscious pocket descended to the street.

He felt he must see Rachel Guerrin again, but for what? His voluminous purposes were narrowing ominously. He scarcely dared go back to the mountains. He must go back. He longed to store her unfurnished life with gay experiences, her roomy heart with intense affections. He thought it a pity, an intolerable pity that her radiance should be fanned and consumed by idle, country breezes only, such as drank up springs, rotted cabbages, and wafted dandelions into glory. He wondered as he walked along how she would appear in Boston. He thought he would like by chance to see her on a flagstone pavement, shading her tulip freshness under an umbrageous parasol; and he would like to touch his hat to her, making meanwhile his mental comments as he did upon other women whom he passed. It might be that his judgment was a little blind, and that however beautiful and even tasteful she might seem among her native hills, the invidious lights of Boston might disclose some fatal lapse of form. Of all the women he had ever known he thought her the most difficult to treat with satisfaction to himself.

The way was long, affording him much time for meditation. He could imagine nothing more enchanting than to start with her on a tour of initiation, making her open wide her ignorant eyes at some of the more

refined among the spectacles to which young men refer when they speak of seeing life. He felt morally certain that she was no more cold than she was dull, and yet she had never seemed to kindle on his account except when he had become flame to reach her. He was willing to become flame for that purpose, a harmless light-blue flame, such as flickers over spirits on rare occasions, but was he willing to become fire-unquenchable, such as consciously or unconsciously she seemed to insist upon? And putting his hands in his pockets as he strode along, he drew out a strange object which he did not remember to have seen before, and for whose secretion he could not account. It recalled him suddenly. He never carried keys. It could not be — it was! And rushing back past interminable blocks of houses, and through streets never so devoid of conveyances, he found his caged lions pacing about their handsome den, having ineffectually moved to adjourn some time before.

Halstead's apologies were profuse ; and though they consisted of little more than a bow and the Washingtonian confession, "Gentlemen, I did it," they seemed, as all his apologies did, sufficient.

"There is some woman at the bottom of it, Halstead," exclaimed one of them, — the same whose family preferred the Boulevard Haussmann to Beacon Street. "What young man keeps his wits in the world where they are!"

And this incident was all his friends in Beaudeck ever heard of him during his unaccountably prolonged absence.

XIV.

IT was a beautiful, hopeful Sunday morning, and even the grasshoppers were keeping it holy. The river flowed with a light serene ; the weeds by the roadside stood reverently erect ; clouds of yellow butterflies hovered here and there, and a cat prowled softly about the premises with true Sunday sloth and receptivity. Dayton, who, for the first time was spending the day alone in the village, and who, perhaps, had some fond previsions with regard to it, sat at his window as if he too were stricken with the smiling, shining, hopeful stillness. He looked down the road past the bridge at the neat little rows of sister houses, and up the road past the mill, on whose steps some broadclothed boys were swinging their Sabbath-breaking legs. Every one in Beaudeck who believed in the God of Israel wore broadcloth on Sunday. The town had a pensive air. It seemed to have its hands above its eyes and to be looking out upon the wide-spread summer-weather by way of occupation.

Dayton was glad to be alone. He thought it strange he should be alone, but since he was alone he gently stroked the ends of his mustache, as if to keep a potential smile beneath it from growing unduly broad. Presently, as his eyes rested on the highest point of the north road, he saw a team winding over the hill,

followed by another, and another, and another ; and as if in answer to his half-formed question, the ladies of the household went down the walk and up the shady street holding the skirts of their black silks in one hand, their parasols in the other, and hugging their gilt hymn-books against their bodies. Then the idea of church dawned upon him.

Dayton rarely went to church. Within the past year he had been but twice : once in San Francisco, when he had gone to hear a popular preacher, and had seemed to sit somewhere outside in a silence of his own, watching through dusty spaces the troubled face of the multiform sinner ; and once in New York, when he had strolled to Old Trinity, and had seemed to sit somewhere outside in the silence with the strange lights of a variegated angel falling athwart him from an expensive window, and had watched a great divine standing in a high place like an allegorical figure of Plenty, shedding plenty of wisdom upon the bowed heads of his wealthy congregation. But after both of these occasions he had felt a strange need of spiritual refreshment. In some respects he acknowledged himself a very benighted fellow ; yet when the sun-shades disappeared, a longing took possession of him, and taking his hat he started in the same direction.

The church was very white and had very green blinds, and as he entered, not without fear of intrusion, the outside of the building seemed to turn inward too, so nearly did its interior correspond to its external aspect in whiteness and greenness. He took a seat far

back, and during the singing of the second psalm, the congregation rose and suddenly turned, surprising him in his observations ; but realizing, after some perturbation, that it was, perhaps, a custom of the people, and not an expression of general amazement at his presence, he too turned, and gave himself up to reluctant contemplation of the cabinet organ. Gradually as the services advanced his first impressions softened. The best bonnets appeared to be sincere and fitting church offerings instead of mistaken exhibits of fashion ; and on closer acquaintance he rather liked the primitive windows and a mural ornament that resembled a gigantic mantel-piece. He looked at the fly-leaf of his hymn-book, where he learned that it was to Mary Adams from her devoted friend Joseph Bluebaker, at a somewhat distant date ; and some childish hieroglyphics and moon-faced sketches just below made him hope that Joseph had not given it to Mary in vain.

The Desborough pew was in the middle of the church, and Rachel in the far end of it, the open-eyed centre, as it were, of this old time flower of Calvinism, was to him the sole sweet prospect of a future. He tried to persuade himself that he had not read aright the signs that bristled around him. Why, if prosperous in his love affairs, should Halstead be away ? It was barely possible that he was not prosperous.

Pleasant country sounds came in at the windows. A warning voice slowly rose and fell beneath the vast mantel-piece ; and Dayton again sat somewhere outside in a silence of his own, stroking the ends of

his mustache, as if to keep the smile beneath it from coming prematurely. He walked home with Miss Hannah, and delighted her with some kindly though hazardous remarks about the sermon. The church was her peculiar possession. Did she not settle its dissensions and its bills, and preside at some of its services? And beside the missionary societies to follow the retreating Indian, had she not instituted a temperance movement that spread far and wide? To be sure, this field of usefulness was not large, as cider-mills were the only things in disrepute; but good work had been done among them, and several of the oldest and most reprobate presses had been turned to better uses.

It was her favorite topic, and she touched upon it on the way. "We cannot see now," she said, "that we make much progress, but we keep working. It is slow, like the formation of rock in the beds of rivers,—very slow. But we don't give up. We are not discouraged." Even the geological periods were but spans to Miss Hannah's patience.

All this time Dayton cherished the idea of spending an hour or two with Rachel while Halstead was still safely beyond the southeastern horizon; but he found the day drawing to a close without having realized his hope.

It was evening when Mr. Guerrin with hospitable intent asked him to walk down to the lower end of the village and look at some cattle he owned there,—a proposition which he did not accept with alacrity.

"How far is it?" he asked for want of something better.

"About a mile."

"A mile!" and in looking about him his eyes fell upon Rachel on the front piazza. "I was wanting," he said with hesitation, "to talk to your daughter." But taking his hat he started down the steps toward the gate as if he would forego that desire. He seemed to be turning a further confidence over in his mind. "I would like," he added, when they were out of hearing of the house, "to marry your daughter."

Mr. Guerrin stopped short. "Eh?" he said. "Not Rachel?"

"That is what I would like," said Dayton, relentlessly.

Mr. Guerrin fitted the ends of his fingers together looking vaguely about him. "Soho!" he softly exclaimed. He had had a gloomy prescience of some such moment as this, but it had never occurred to him that the blow might come from such a quarter.

"I thought you ought to know what sort of a man it was you were harboring under your roof," continued Dayton. "I have designs."

"I half expected it from Halstead," said Mr. Guerrin, moving on, "but I never thought of it from you."

Dayton seemed to wish to take the edge off this reproach. "I could take good care of her, sir," he said.

"It is n't that,—it is n't that!" said the elder, who felt that fathers should be left in undisturbed possession of their daughters,—at least in Massachusetts.

"She does n't know anything about it," said Dayton, to be honest. "Perhaps she would not look at me, as a husband." The word applied to himself seemed to please him. "I would make her a good husband, sir," he said, with smiling ardor. "I would have more respect for myself if there were some one dependent upon me."

They had reached the gate, and Dayton stopped with his hand on the arch, as if that were the terminus of his walk. "I would like to have her know about it soon," he resumed. "A man ought to give a woman time to think seriously of him and not wait for a grand climax in which to make his appeal and get his answer in a breath."

"Why man," cried Mr. Guerrin, as if he suddenly saw a clear and unexpected solution of his difficulty, "Rachel is going away. She has made all her plans. You are too late. She is n't thinking of marriage," — and the observation plainly gave him satisfaction. "I have no objection to you, but she is n't thinking of marriage."

"Going away!" ejaculated Dayton.

"Yes,— to her great-aunt's. Another Desborough that was."

"How long to be gone."

"The rest of the summer. You see the letter came some time ago, but she only decided yesterday or the day before, and now she can't get away soon enough. I am glad to have you here. I hope you'll stay, but she is going."

Rachel still walked slowly up and down the long piazza, her arms folded behind her back, her chin up. She seemed to have a great many thoughts. But instead of joining her, Dayton went back to the wing. "Going away!" he reiterated, and dissolution seemed already to set in. Everything except the column he leaned against seemed to be receding out of his reach, and for perhaps the first time in his life he felt the futility of effort.

Dayton was tall, broad shouldered, full chested, and with the look of a man who never dwelt upon himself, and had no apparent intentions with regard to his appearance. He dressed well, yet was never heard to mention the subject of clothes. He had fair manners, yet never commented upon the habits of the vulgar. He spoke tolerable English, yet no deviations gave him pain. Even his morals seemed to escape comparison in his mind with the nefarious practices of his fellow-men. He seemed to have a certain tacit sense of the ineptitude of error; and a practical perception of the fitness of the correct for him, and his fitness for the correct stood him instead of myriads of tastes and principles. He took no credit to himself for being whatever he was, except what concerned his reputation as an engineer, and perhaps his early and decided bias for superior work had been a large grace in the life of a man in whom the animal nature had plainly not been eliminated that the intellectual might prosper.

His hair was short, dark, dry, and thin. His skin was brown, and not without a suggestion of leather;

and his mouth was over large. His usual expression was that of a worker of problems, but when he smiled the problems blew away. He was not smiling now, and Rachel remarked his present effort at solution, which was apparently connected with the mountain range before him ; then she turned and went into the house.

Presently Dayton knocked upon the window and asked if he might come in.

"It seems you are going away," he said, as he crossed the threshold and advanced into the room.

"Who told you ?" she asked.

"Why didn't you tell me yourself ? "

"It is no great news," said Rachel.

"Yes, it is. It is astounding," he insisted.

Rachel smiled, and agreed with him that perhaps it was. "We don't travel much," she said.

"Is n't it rather — sudden."

"Any departure is sudden for us. I feel as if I were breaking something."

"So do I," said Dayton.

"Won't you sit down ?" she asked, observing that he was still standing without any apparent purpose.

But Dayton had a less formal intention. "I would rather not," he answered ; "let us go."

"Go where ?"

"Wherever you like. There are no destinations about here. We might for once go out without one. Did you have enough of a walk outside ? You sometimes stroll."

"I did not know," said Rachel, "that you ever did anything so aimless."

She went with him out upon the piazza, and with her elbows in her hands began to walk up and down again in much the same fashion as before, looking out between the columns with half averted face.

"That won't do," said Dayton, resenting his slight connection with her promenade. "I expect you to take my arm. I want to talk to you. You have yet to say good-by to me. How are you going to do it?"

"I am not going to do it," said Rachel. "I don't believe in it. It is a sorrowful, foolish word. We shed our salty tears over it when we are really glad to go."

"I won't object to the tears," observed Dayton.

"But I would," she answered smiling; and he felt himself drawn by her smile from the seriousness of the future to the fascination of the hour.

"If we are going to walk out here," she went on, "you ought to smoke. You always smoke when you walk. It would seem more natural."

Dayton stopped, took out a cigar and lighted it. "This," he said, "is a brand which I import myself. There is a masterful notion in this country that what one imports one's self is better than anything accessible to the public. I have a friend who imports the most execrable wines at an enormous price, and another who smuggles pictures. We are all alike; we would distinguish ourselves by the compliment of a special importation. My specialty is cigars. This one, you will find, burns slowly,—it takes from three to five hours."

Rachel laughed ; and this time she took his arm.

"Explain it to me," he presently begged in an easier tone than he would have thought possible a few minutes before. "Explain it to me. What takes you away just now? Haven't we made it as pleasant for you as you have made it for us?"

"You have made it very pleasant," she assented with slight constraint.

"You will have a whole life-time in which to get away. You can go in '83 or in '91. Great-aunts are patient. They can wait."

"Mine is n't of that sort. She can't wait."

"Is she so desperately fond of you ? "

"She would n't know me if she saw me."

They reached the end of the piazza, and turned to retrace their steps. "Perhaps she anticipates a great deal from your visit," conjectured Dayton. He seemed to be speaking of some remote event which failed just then to impress him with the force of fact.

"On the contrary, I am afraid the thought of it makes her nervous." And Rachel turned her face again toward the gate-ways.

"Is your aunt a nervous person ?" he inquired minutely.

"They tell me she is very nervous."

They walked on a few minutes more in silence. "I thought," said Rachel, "that you wanted to talk to me."

Dayton roused himself. "So I did," he cried. "So I do. I am in a constant state of wanting to talk to you. I am haunted by an idea that I have a great

deal to say to you. I am no talker, you know. I listen to these fluent people in amazement, and wonder where it all comes from and what starts it. It is a great thing to have vagrant ideas always blowing across your mind in an easy, breezy fashion."

"Not exactly great," the girl dissented.

"As for me," resumed Dayton, "I have no sentiments except those that are alive with some agitation. I occasionally get a little glibness when something stirs the pools, but I can't dip in at any cool moment and produce a nice observation. I don't perceive except under the influence of feeling. I am either sluggish, or I know no bounds. For the life of me I can't talk about the moon. I have very rarely known there was a moon."

"I have heard enough about the moon," she declared.

"What have n't you heard about? If there is anything in my line"—

"You were born in Rio Janeiro; you might begin there," said the girl.

"Who told you that?"

"Mr. Halstead. He told me too that you did remarkable things to the rivers in California,—making them run up hill, or something like that. And there was a wonderful bridge over a stream that ran nothing but quicksand,—miles of quicksand. Oh, he gave me some great ideas!"

"He did, did he? But the highly colored ideas he gives one of others are always accompanied by most agreeable impressions of himself."

"He can't tell anything otherwise," she replied.

"I would rather furnish you the baldest facts," said Dayton.

"Does your family still live in South America?" she inquired.

"My family? I haven't any," — and he laughed a little. "All I remember of the time when I belonged to a family is going down-stairs one night with my mother to call a Portuguese woman, and rousing all the dogs and the negroes that slept in the entrance way. I assure you, though, we were very nice people, if that is what you would like to know."

"Yes," said Rachel. "I like to know that."

"Oh, you need n't be afraid that we were common. I suspect that my mother was almost elegant."

"I should not wonder," said Rachel thoughtfully.

She had begun to look before them along the line of the piazza.

"While we lived as a family," he said, "we lived well. We had the refinements. But it did not last. My father was a ship captain, running between New York and Rio, but he died when I was a youngster, and my mother soon followed him. She always followed him when he was going to stay in port for any length of time. She was very fond of him."

"What became of you?"

"I was sent to my grandfather's in a New Hampshire town."

"Did you live there?"

"No longer than I could help," said Dayton. "I

ran away." Rachel had turned quite around, and to be thus ardently questioned seemed most auspicious. He examined his cigar. It had gone quite out.

"And then what?" pursued the girl.

"I went to Boston."

"Well?"

"You don't want me to tell you the rest, do you? The romance dies out when I come to the front. It grows prosy to the last degree. Ask me something later. I don't know how well you could stand the first few years of my career."

"Try me."

"I prefer not to try you in any way. I am timid."

Rachel seemed to think him humorous. "You must have been poor, then," she said.

"I would rather like to give the lad I was then a lift," assented Dayton. "During the war I was in an engineer regiment. Since then I have been in California, and here, there, and most anywhere on the frontier line of a railroad. Had n't we better quit this? It is too egotistical."

"Had you friends in Boston?" she persisted.

"Only those I made. I have always had friends among men. It has been among men that I have lived. I have n't known many families,—not many women. I have knocked about a great deal in the western country where there were none to speak of. I believe I have had rather a rough time of it, without knowing it till now."

"I went up last night to say good-by to Mrs. Ster-

ling," said Rachel, as if her mind found some easy connection between the topics,—probably considering Mrs. Sterling the one woman of his acquaintance.

"Good-by?" repeated Dayton.

"I go to-morrow, you know. Did n't you see my trunks?"

She seemed to expect some sympathetic good wishes for her journey, but Dayton stopped and looked down upon her with his problematic air. "Is that settled?" he asked.

"Settled? Yes, of course."

Dayton took hold of a bench before him making it creak. "Settled!" he said, and he seemed to wish to shake in like manner the decision that was closed against him. While he considered it Rachel took a short turn by herself, looking out among the elms again.

"Do you know," she began impersonally, "I think you have had a fine sort of life."

"Are you trying to congratulate me?" asked Dayton. "Come; as a life how does it strike you? Looking at it impartially, what do you think of it,—of its symmetry, its completeness, its exquisite finish?—of its conception, its execution? Nothing mechanical about it. No lop-sidedness, no crudity. Oh, it is truly fine!—a destiny, don't you think, that a man might be proud to have carved for himself? And I have n't been more than forty years about it, either. It has the beauty, I should say, of a trestle-work. It looks as if it had been made by an inspired money-seeker with an ax. You set me up. You make me feel vain."

Rachel flushed a little. He seemed to be deriding her excessive simplicity. "It seemed fine to me," she said, with modest sincerity.

"It occurs to me at last," continued Dayton, "that among other huge things I have made a huge mistake. It is the hugest of all. I thought once that if a man could build bridges, he could bridge anything, — do anything. We bridge only brooks, and it only leads to the bridging of more brooks. It has no earthly connection with achievement in finer directions. I thought if I could build my bridge and cross it, I would be a powerful fellow. You don't mean to tell me that I am a powerful fellow, Miss Guerrin. You can't exactly say that I have much influence with you, for instance. I wish now that I had spent a good part of my time weaving webs. You can't weave webs with grappling irons. I am a failure. Mine has been a heavy, crude performance, one-sided, ridiculous, — ending in nothing."

"Is success, then, so disastrous?" asked Rachel, as if the facts compelled her to look lightly upon his phenomenal and satirical despair. "If you give up, the rest of us need never begin."

"Oh, I shall not give up. I know nothing else than to keep on. I shall go back to my bridges, and you will go on to your aunts. That is the arrangement, is n't it? We both, I think, have the gift of continuance. Who is this aunt that you are so enamored with? And where does she live? Suppose we sit down and talk about her. You love your aunts as

I love my bridges. My heart is full of bridges with roaring cataracts under them. Sit down and I will tell you about them. And you shall tell me about your aunts, particularly the one with the nervous affection. I think that I perhaps have the same malady."

"Not you!" said Rachel. She was still smiling vaguely. "Not you!" she said.

"I can't tell," said Dayton, "till I hear the diagnosis. She can't wait, that is one thing."

He was often puzzling to her. She met his intent gaze a moment, her own becoming briefly as intent. "I know you less and less," she finally said.

"Whose fault is that?" he asked.

"Your's, when you talk like that," she answered, beginning her faltering smile again.

"You should be so kind as to tell me what my prospects are?"

"Prospects! I don't know much about prospects. I have done no prospecting to speak of."

"So long as a man is in pursuit of a livelihood," continued Dayton, "the result may be somewhere in proportion to his endeavors, but when he demands a sentiment, he gets it or not, as it happens. Affinities and subtleties beyond him come in about that time, and aid him or thwart him, as the case may be. That is where our tracks run up trees. My track has run up a tree."

"There is a mistake somewhere," said Rachel; "there is a mistake somewhere!"

"Where?" exclaimed Dayton.

There was that about him that Rachel had never

seen before ; a fervor, a recklessness, a willingness to harbor in his hitherto independent and solitary being whatever of warmth or familiarity might be allotted to him ; a desire to command it even, though he might thereby lay himself open to disappointment and rebuff. He seemed to include her, and her only, in his new freak of passionate hospitality.

The door of the hall stood open. She thought of going in. She thought of what Halstead had said.

"Know me better : know me well ; — good might come of it," he cried. "How is it that men find their way into the regard of women ? However it is, that is what I want. I would like to be in the ring that binds people together. Can't you make room for me somewhere near you ?"

"You don't know" — Rachel began.

"Yes, I do," he answered, interrupting her. "I know all about it. That is the trouble with me. I know it isn't I whom you have been considering. I am not seeking your confidence. I would rather not have it just now ; it might dispirit me. All I ask of you is to take some account of my pretensions when you are making up your plans. I want you to think well of me, and to remember that on all possible occasions I lay claims to your attention. I want to help you enjoy your life."

"I can't think of it," said Rachel, with deep excitement. "I can't think of it." She felt, indeed, a certain sense of self-disparagement in listening to words of such similar import at such short intervals from both these strange gentlemen.

"But you will," said Dayton, with persistent hopefulness. "If you were altogether happy you would not be going away. I don't ask you to begin now. I only want to impress your opportunities upon you. When you come back we will begin anew. Was n't it in your programme that I should be here when you came back?"

"No," she answered, with hesitation.

"No matter," he rejoined. "You can put it in now. Wherever I am I shall turn up here again." He had taken her hand, she did not know just when, and was looking fervidly down upon her.

From somewhere in the back of the house Miss Hannah was heard advancing, putting down windows and fastening bolts as she came; and Rachel, releasing herself, shadowed along the piazza.

XV.

WHEN Rachel got off the train at the city of H.—an old gentleman with uncertain manner looked her over in eager inspection, then veiled his inquiring glance behind the usual guise of strangers, waited till the passengers had all alighted; passed and repassed her with slow steps, leaning on his cane, till finally, meeting her face to face, he came forward with outstretched hand.

“Well, well!” he said, “I believe it is,” and he laughed slightly as if it were a joke on somebody. “Your aunt,” he presently explained, “is waiting outside. She sent me in to find you. She told me—well, no matter what she told me!” and he laughed again.

“This, Sabra,” he said, stopping before a landau in which sat a thin oldish lady with very precise manners, “this is the little villager whom you were expecting. You will be relieved to see her. And this, my dear,” turning to Rachel, “is your great-aunt.” And depositing her satchels on the seat, he looked from one to the other as if he had prepared some witty surprise.

“I don’t see, Robert,” returned the lady, “what you find to be amused at. My husband,” she added apologetically, “is amused at everything. And he will call me Sabra. I am glad, my dear, that they gave

you a better name, though Rachel, to be sure, is not quite fashionable now. I am glad to see you, and Mr. Cotter, I know, will be pleased. He is very fond of young people. I would be, too, but my health, you know, is not the best. I am troubled a great deal with asthma. Ar'n't you going to ride up, Robert?"

"No," replied Mr. Cotter. "I will hunt up her — her bandboxes. I will be there by the time you get the dust off." And closing the door he went away, smiling still.

"You have n't been in the city before," began the lady, as they started up the street. "Drive slowly, Matthew. I understand you have always lived in the country. Beaudeck is a very shut-up place. I spent my own girlhood there, strange as it may seem. I hope it will do you good to get away. You ought to see more. Our streets are not very lively now. A great many of our best people are away, though some prefer to go south winters and stay at home in the hot season. I did n't suppose you would care, not being used to it. I thought we might have a quiet time among ourselves. I told Mr. Cotter you would n't care for society, but, come to see you, you look as if you might. You are one of the straight-nosed Desboroughs, after all. I did n't know but you might be something of a Guerrin. You have your father's expression, though — something about the eyes, or is it the mouth? Matthew, more slowly. Mr. Cotter will be glad to have you with us, I am sure. He is a very peculiar man. I have no children of my own, you

know. They died when they were very small, and it can't be helped now. I think Mr. Cotter feels it is my duty to supply the house in some way with young people. We have everything else, but he is n't satisfied. He would have the house stretched open from morning till night, even on the Sabbath, I am afraid, if he had his way. I try not to let him have his way in all things. He has his way a great deal. It was he proposed to send for you. He gave up his practice much too soon, though he is older than he seems. We both are. When he had his business he did n't seem to care so much for other things — Matthew, Matthew! Are you afraid of horses, my dear? I never like to jolt across these tracks. I wonder that the people tolerate street-cars. They are the ruin of the streets. I have heard they took a great deal of pains with you, sending you away to school and so on, but that would n't have given you your complexion or your nose. Probably it helped about your dresses. You certainly look very nice. I have some friends, my dear, that I would like to introduce you to. I could almost wish now that it was a gayer season. I would like to have them see what I was like at your age. After all, there are a good many left, — some of the best. The Hannas are still here. But they are always here. They hate travel. We will have our friends come and see you. Mr. Cotter, I think, will like it too. It would keep him at home more. I can't tell you how many times a day he goes down street; and he always walks. He won't even have his newspapers

brought to the house. He goes out and buys them. Every time a paper comes, he goes out and buys it. If there were many more papers he would never be at home. It is n't that he reads them all. Half of them he stuffs in his pockets. It is a great waste. I believe he does it on account of the newsboys. It is the same way with the barbers and the shoe-blacks. He will want you to go out with him a great deal. Do you walk? I never walk. Mr. Cotter says I would be better if I would go out, but I have gone out and was no better. He has the rheumatism himself, but he won't admit it. Rheumatism does n't show unless it is very bad. He has it worse than he pretends. Any body can tell the asthma. I hope you will like our city. It is n't large, but some of our stores are very fine. There is a great deal of wealth here. I will take you to the stores myself. We have n't many young people. I don't think there are as many young people as there used to be; but I know a few, and they know others. I suppose I might take the time to go out more, but servants are always careless unless watched."

It was with this familiar sort of allocution that Mrs. Cotter beguiled the time between the depot and her house, and to which her niece now and then responded as opportunity was afforded her. They were admitted by a sable servant, and Rachel was left for a moment in the closed and darkened drawing rooms, in which she felt too formal even to look about her. They were in wonderful order, and it would have been a

bold person who could even take a chair without murmuring something to the effect that necessity knew no law. It seemed as if their occupants were dead, and everything was lovely. Presently she was shown up-stairs to a large front room by a maid, who hastily explained that as a change had been made in her apartment, things might not be quite as neat as they might be; though Rachel, in looking about her, could see nothing further to be desired. She thought it the finest room she had ever been in. It had a chandelier over the dressing-case, and a lace coverlet on the bed, with neither of which luxuries she was familiar.

"I forgot to ask," began Mrs. Cotter, later, softly-bustling around as they came out of the dining-room, "about your mother and her sisters, my nieces, or rather my half nieces or step-nieces. It is a pity for families to separate so. I wish now that I had known you all along. I might have advised them about your education. I suppose you know Latin? I learned some Latin myself at the hill school, but it has n't been of much use to me. There is n't much Latin floating about in conversation. I don't see the use of learning things you have to cover up. Sit here, my dear. I always said that accomplishments were as good as anything for girls. Robert, will you open that other window?"

Mr. Cotter opened the other window, and spread apart the curtains with an expression of humorous obedience. They were long windows, opening on

very small balconies. As he did so, something down the street caught his eye, and going out he stepped down to the gate.

"There he goes again," said Mrs. Cotter, "and without his hat." Something seemed also to catch her eye and she bent far forward over her lap. "I do hope," she went on, as if communing with herself, "that he will wait and speak to him. It would be as good a time as any to tell him."

Rachel, sitting in front of one of the windows, also looked out.

Across the street was a large, dark house in an immense yard surrounded by a high fence. The gate was open, and a gentleman was walking down the roadway picking his teeth. Mr. Cotter, at his own gate, was waiting the approach of a breathless boy who had newspapers under his arm, when the dark gentleman who had come from the opposite house sauntered along and stopped to exchange sentences with him. He then returned to the drawing-room carrying a damp evening sheet.

"Did you ask him in?" inquired his wife, when he reappeared at the door.

"Ask whom in?"

"Jerome, of course."

"No."

"Nor even tell him to call?"

"No," again admitted the delinquent.

"Well, that shows!" said Mrs. Cotter, reproachfully. "But he saw you, my dear. That is what he stopped for," and she nodded her head at Rachel.

"He was greatly affected at seeing the windows open," returned her husband, as if poking some one in the ribs.

He looked down his paper; then went out again, shortly returning as before. "I told Matthew to bring back the horses," he announced. "I am going to the club. They have some pictures to show for the benefit of — I forget now what. I would like to take the young lady with me."

"Robert!" protested Mrs. Cotter. "She's too tired."

"Oh, no, I am not tired," said Rachel.

"It's no place to show her first."

"Put a veil on, then," pursued that gentleman. "You can unveil her to-morrow at church with all the more effect. We'll have it in the papers."

Rachel had risen with smiling readiness, and Mrs. Cotter slowly rose also. "If you *will* go," she said, after some fluttering hesitation, "I ought to go too. It may not stuff me up *much*, and perhaps the evening *would* be a little long."

"Good!" said Mr. Cotter, as if wonders would never cease.

As they crossed the pavement to the carriage the same dark gentleman came strolling back, and Mrs. Cotter stopped to speak to him. As she left him she nodded several times. "And bring your mother with you," she said, nodding again from the carriage. "Why don't you inquire who that is?" she asked of Rachel, as they drove away.

"I don't know," replied the girl. "Who is it?"

"You are,—let me see, you must be over twenty. How old, Robert, should you think Mr Hanna was?"

"I don't see that it makes much difference how old he is," returned her husband. "He is forty odd. Probably the young lady is not much interested in the ages of old men?"

"He is not a favorite of Mr. Cotter's," explained the lady. "I don't know why. He is an estimable young man. He is a warden in the church, and he has always been very good to his mother. We are neighbors. She and I have always been very friendly. She is not a pleasant person, but what she says has great weight. Jerome looks after her property for her. He is a good son."

"Has he no other business?" asked Rachel, making conversation.

"He tends some to other people's," said Mr. Cotter amiably.

No man in the small metropolis where he lived was better known than Robert Cotter. (He was always spoken of as Robert Cotter.) He was nothing if not a citizen; and though his usefulness lay chiefly in the past,—consisting now in reputation, in his connection with subscription lists, and in the imposing presence which he frequently lent to public assemblies, he was regarded by the people with a kindly and reasonable pride. He liked well-worn flagstones, whittled peanut stands, crowded passage-ways, green groceries trespassing on the pavement, and streets blocked with

traffic. He liked working-men's meetings, historical societies, cobblers' associations, drum-corps, scientific assemblies, polls, station-houses, lecture rooms, barber shops,— all sorts of urban and suburban sights and sounds ; and it was only as it filled the stomachs of the towns that he took an interest in the country. It was told of him that sauntering one morning along the busy main street, he was accosted by a friend, who inquired after his welfare. "I am perfectly happy," returned Mr. Cotter, "perfectly happy; I have n't even a thought." His form was erect, his face smooth-shaven, his hair white, and he habitually wore a swallow-tailed coat and a white tie. A picture of him was frescoed upon the walls of the courthouse, and he frequently paid it his respects, as if to by-gone talent and virile strength. He had married early, and had discovered almost simultaneously that he was strangely alien to feminine perfections. "Perfection cannot change," he said ; "I can." He changed very much, but from some peculiar association he had not been in Beaudeck for a quarter of a century. He married in Beaudeck. And in the years since then the wife of his youthful bosom had come to bear about the same relation to that bosom that a damson plum bears to Covent Garden.

It was said that he had been intemperate, though nobody seemed to know exactly when.

The twinkling eyes that had taken such varied scenes upon their restless retinas were somewhat dim. The sonorous voice that had made the flesh creep

along the backs of juries was somewhat husky. His step was slow, and when he spoke he generally stopped as if it were growing difficult to carry on both processes at once. And the hand which held his newspaper was unsteady, though the markets were still quoted as firm. "Where are all the young people, the gay people?" he asked, one day. And this was the origin of the letter to Rachel.

Mrs. Cotter had regular features, a dark complexion, black eyes, and a nose rather apt to be red from October till May. She came out of her room every morning in a pair of soft slippers, with a soft worsted shawl about her shoulders; poured the coffee without a drop upon the cloth; told her dreams and her illnesses in a soft flannel voice in her well moments,—otherwise in rather wheezing tones; gave her orders to her servants; footed up her accounts (Robert Cotter always laughed at these accounts), and then occupied herself in bringing some detail of her house to that point of severe nicety which is only possible in the absence of children and external interests.

She had looked forward with considerable anxiety to Rachel's visit, fearing she might be mortified by the crudities of a young creature from the hills, and shrinking from the idea of an awkward relative, since kinship with a common person illustrates unpleasantly the accident of one's own elegance. She might conscientiously have faced an ill-dressed niece, but she would have suffered much from it at night, and would have explained to every one how it happened. She

was fond of explaining how things happened, and could always trace misfortune to personal imprudence,— everything except asthma, which was sent direct from Heaven. There was very little in the world which she could not explain, and in colds, bankruptcies, misfits, and all sorts of wretchedness she was very apt. Mr. Cotter, on the other hand, found much that was inscrutable here below, and ignorantly believed that many persons, even poor sick persons, were quite blameless. Furthermore he never told his wife when he felt a twinge of rheumatism, or when he met with any loss.

The experiment, however, with the young creature from the hills, who proved a charming and beautiful creature, was eminently satisfactory ; and finding Rachel a credit to her,— a neat and unexpected compliment to the family,— Mrs. Cotter sought to do the proper thing by her in every respect. Not only were the piano and shutters left open, the furniture covers permanently removed, and an injurious draft allowed in the halls, but she soon introduced her to her finest and most terrible friends, without reluctance or reservation, and was surprised to find how many young persons, particularly young gentlemen, there were connected with the families of her acquaintance. Liveried footmen brought cards to the door, and elaborate toilets tripped up the steps ; while short, broad backs, and tall, straight backs crooked at evening over the low iron gate hunting the unfamiliar latch. This pleased the greatest of aunts, who laid aside some of

her soft woolens, grew better in health, and quietly pursued a project not unconnected with a neighboring estate incumbered with a bachelor. It was very exciting. It seemed many years to Mrs. Cotter since virgins married bachelors.

To Rachel Guerrin herself the first day or two of her visit seemed as flavorless as real life when one lays down a vivid romance. She had come. She would stay. She wished to plunge with all her heart into her new diversions, but she did not find herself as interested as she had expected to be in a discursive view over this larger and more populous field. The city was full of strangers, the extent of whose strangeness she had not yet measured, but which she believed to be very deep; yet the process of lessening that strangeness was not absorbing, and when alone her thoughts centered upon what was already familiar to her.

When she had been there some days she stepped out the front door one afternoon upon the flight of stone steps which was savagely guarded by lions; satisfied herself that the third button of her glove was securely fastened; looked down at the fine horses and the glittering spokes of the equipage in waiting; also at the smiling party there assembled for an excursion, and realized that she was part of the gay, philandering world to which Nathan Halstead had always belonged, and of which she too had wished to be a member. She knew that wherever she went friends waited to attend her, and when she stopped a small court gathered

round her. She knew, too, that when she went down a room full of people heads fell off,—heads cropped close like gladiators. And she took no notice. It was owing to her Greek nose.

“Rachel,” said Mrs. Cotter one day, “you should begin to think of being married. There are gentlemen here—not too young, who ought to satisfy a girl much more ambitious than you, and if you are wise you will look about you.”

“But I am not wise,” answered Rachel.

“I will be wise for you,” offered her aunt.

“Oh, please don’t,” said the girl in alarm.

It was that very evening that young Garrotson, whose locks were cropped very close indeed, paused at the door as he was about to take his leave, and putting his hands to his head (perhaps to sustain an emptiness there), said to her, “I am infatuated. I love you.” He had heretofore had an extremely dull summer.

“I am very sorry,” said Rachel, sincerely, but a trifle disdainfully, as she raised her profile against the curtains. She wondered if this were illustrative of Mrs. Cotter’s wisdom.

When the door closed behind him she fell into a reverie. After a time the disdain disappeared. Even her brightness was obscured. Her face grew softer, and she sat with her hands in her lap in a dreaming attitude. She sat a long time, and it is not impossible that her desire for the varied social life had changed to a dream of the fuller and intenser heart-life to which the young and the rustic look vaguely forward.

It was in a letter to Margaret Duncan that Rache set down some of her impressions of this time. Margaret had in fact taken that sort of fancy to her which very plain and practical women will sometimes take to those who are beautiful and whom they suspect of being unsettled at heart. She wished in some way to help her shift through with her beauty and sensibility into the superior condition of homeliness and matter-of-factness, and meanwhile wove about her that romance which nature forbade her to weave round herself.

In answer to a letter Rachel told her she was glad to hear from her; was glad to be missed; and was sorry to have dropped so suddenly out of their summer. "What am I doing, do you ask?" she went on. "Realizing my dreams, thank you. It is a severe ordeal. I have met more people than I can name or recall at sight, and I shift from one engagement to another as fast as I can get ready. At first I thought the visiting, of which we do a great deal, quite tame, but now I think it the reverse of tame. By we, I mean my aunt and me. She always goes with me, and likes, I think, to revive her social accomplishments. Formalities please her greatly, and when I want to be altogether agreeable I call her madam. Perhaps most women beam upon those who call them madam, — do they? She regrets the fallow years I spent among the hills, my walks, my rides, my everything else that I mistook for enjoyment; and commiserates me that I had never had any engraved cards — nothing with Tuesdays or any other day of the week on it. But

this, and some of my other glaring deficiencies, have long since been made up, and she is so kind as to want to dispose of the brief remainder of my wasted days in her own way. She is even more kind to me than I would be to myself, and takes care of me as if I were something very fragile.

"We keep quite an open house, and a good many visitors invited and uninvited come every day. Some of them are Mrs. Cotter's friends; some of them their delightful daughters, and some a club of young men, calling themselves by a big name, and doing everything in the most uniform and fire-department manner. There is a gentleman here, not of the club, who says he has met Mrs. Sterling; a Mr. Hanna, Jerome Hanna, I believe, is his name. He lives near, and seems long to have been in Mrs. Cotter's favor. He does a great deal to please her, including taking me to ride on a fine horse that he calls a genuine Hambletonian, whatever that is. Not to know the merits of a genuine Hambletonian implies great ignorance, I infer. He was here to dinner again yesterday, and afterward in the library he asked me if I knew the origin of the term Welsh-rabbit. I hurried and said No, what was it? but just then some others came in, and I did not get to hear. We are invited to-morrow to his mother's,—perhaps he may tell me there.

"All this, of course, is an old story to you, but to me, please remember, it is quite, quite new. It reminds me of former occasions when, alone years ago in the garden at home, I played the great lady with aunt Han-

nah's parasol above me and trumpet flowers drawn on my fingers for gloves. I was Anna Cora Mowatt then, and I visited Joan of Arc, who lived on a flower-pot under the asparagus bushes. I don't know who I am now, and I meet no one who resembles Joan. I like it, yet every once in a while I find myself wanting to recreate in the extensive silence about my home. Here one has no time to think, and I am not acclimated to so much gayety.

"Among other things my aunt is soon to give me a party, which will fill both the house and the yard,—I must tell you about the yard. There is very little of it in front, and that little is filled with balconies and railings and vases; but back of the house there is a large court, full of fragrance and shade, and the whole is surrounded by a brick wall ten feet high, like a convent of old. Whenever I have any leisure I retire to my convent with my uncle, who is a fine, genial gentleman. He has been a fine, genial gentleman for seventy-five years.

"Soon after the party we are going to the Isles of Shoals, where Mr. and Mrs. Cotter go every year, and after that I am going home. Sometimes I think I must go before. I heard a priest say once that women always want to be where they are not."

It happened that Halstead heard this letter discussed at Mrs. Anderson's, where he sat one evening meditating upon his past record and the summer scene before him. In the course of it he remembered that he, too, had once known a young fellow residing in that

city, and pausing a moment in intent retrospection he recalled his name. It was M. D. Short, according to his signature, and Miss Demeanor Short, according to the vernacular of his club, in which a certain rattling adventure on the part of that gentleman had once made some noise.

XVI.

THE neighbor mentioned in the foregoing came to dinner frequently, and indeed his relations with Mrs. Cotter's family seemed to be such as would admit his presence there at almost any hour of the day or evening. He seemed to Rachel a sort of social cactus, and she wondered that her aunt should take pleasure in cultivating in a friendly way such a brown-stone-hot-house product. He lived alone with his mother, who cherished him as the cactus of her bosom, and they occupied a gloomy penitentiary across the way, which was surrounded by a tall iron fence and an osage-orange hedge to keep out the gaze of the impudent populace.

The estate as yet was the mother's, and she regarded her son as she did her lands, as property not to be dissipated, or to pass out of the family without her consent, but as he was forty and still uninvested, she once conferred with Mrs. Cotter about it.

From time to time during the past twenty years Jerome had emerged from his greatness and gloom to pursue for a season the acquaintance of some young woman who caught his fancy, but even that as a rule did not last long. "No woman," he once declared, "can really entertain a man for an hour,—by her conversation," and men he sometimes spoke of as con-

ceited beggars. Upon the whole he went through life lonely and suspicious, like a man with a lantern,—a lantern that illumined a small circle about him, but left the outer darkness peopled with shapes all more or less dubious. He did not approve mankind. He had never had any business beyond the care of the family property, but, though content with mediocrity from day to day, he was, and always had been, a great man in the future. Among other things, he meditated a voyage of discovery up the Nile, an article on Catholicism in the "North American Review," and a lecture on finance at Cooper Institute, and he was about to begin, when one day he saw Rachel pass the lions opposite, and go into the house. He waited, but she did not reappear, and he shortly made an excuse to cross the street. After that he fell into a habit of going over there. He rode horseback with her, sent her magnificent flowers from the greenhouse and baskets of fruit from his orchards, in all of which she saw a high and mighty form of neighborliness from the chief friend of the family. It had much to do with her popularity, since the young lady whom Jerome Hanna distinguished became at once an object of interest and solicitation,—and had not Mrs. Hanna, who so rarely gave dinners, given a dinner for her?

But it was toward the night of Mrs. Cotter's party that his gifted mind came to a focus on one of the minor points bearing upon a great career, and he determined to distinguish that evening from the mass of evenings, as he distinguished the fair Miss Guerrin

from the mass of women. The old house was completely rejuvenated on that occasion, and all its dark solemnity hustled out-of-doors, even beyond the high wall encircling the brilliantly lighted court. Rachel, radiant with an irrepressible bloom, stood near her aunt, talking to some of the last arrived, while Jerome watched her from a position near the piano, waiting for the moment to come when, her duties over, he could take her among the dancers, or, better yet, among the Chinese lanterns in the garden, under whose exotic auspices he would bring to light the burden of his soul. It seemed to him that the guests would never assemble, and that they were greatly in excess of the number necessary to celebrate his intentions. To pass the tedious time he addressed an acquaintance here and there, or, relapsing within himself, strolled through the thronged and decorated rooms as if they were an unbroken solitude ; always returning beneath Mrs. Cotter's smiles to his position near the piano, on the top of which instrument he beat a light tattoo. As he stood there looking at Rachel he was more certain than ever that she suited him : slender, yet not too slender ; easy, yet not too easy ; vivacious, yet not too vivacious ; with something in her sentences like intelligence, — a woman's intelligence, of course, not cold, not bold, — at that very moment there was a flush spreading over her face. And then a slight confusion occurred among Hanna's ideas.

A stranger entering late in the company of young Short extended to her an immaculate white glove, and

a voice, to which her color had never been wholly insensible, said, "Good evening, Miss Guerrin." Her eyes scarcely rose above the white cravat, certainly not above the light mustache, and then she introduced him to Mr. and Mrs. Cotter, and that lady frowned. Halstead was his name, and she said he was from Beaudeck,— all of which seemed to make upon young Short a profound impression.

Nathan took in at a glance the costume of the fair girl before him, her bare, white arms, her ardent face, and the pale roses that lolled upon her bosom. She was a country girl no longer, and confronting her at his full height, way up among the lights of the chandelier he seemed to be, he felt his eye, his clear mind's eye, losing sight of everything within the rotundity of heaven except the woman with whom he was in love. He was slightly pale, and there was a new mobility about his mouth, but excitement of that sort was to him only an intenser self-possession, and the critical observation bent upon him from the piano could see only a trim, well-dressed man, wonderfully at home in such a situation for an inhabitant of Beaudeck.

"We have heard of you often, Mr. Halstead," said Mrs. Cotter, with a thin and too intentional smile.

"Have you? That is always pleasant," answered Nathan.

"Not always," she responded.

"The young man means," said Mr. Cotter, "that it is always pleasant to hear of *him*, in which I think he cannot be mistaken."

"It is always a favor at any rate to discover a meaning in a young man's weak remarks," said Halstead, turning his indescribably genial face toward his host.

Then other guests arriving they stepped aside till Mrs. Cotter, touching Halstead on the arm with her fan, asked him if he would not be introduced to some of her friends.

"I would be most happy," said that diplomatic fellow, and Rachel being left thus free, Mr. Hanna immediately came forward.

"You have a friend here," he said, as he offered his arm to lead her through the long drawing-rooms.

"I have several," replied Rachel briefly.

"But one from Beadeck," said Jerome.

"He is from Boston,—from everywhere," said Rachel.

"He does not live in Beadeck then?"

"He has been for a short time in our family."

"Is the arrangement—ah—permanent?"

"On the contrary, transient. None of his arrangements are permanent. There are a great many people here," she went on, looking around her, "and my aunt told me I was to be agreeable to everybody. You must tell me where to begin."

"You are to begin with me," he assured her; "did n't she tell you that? There is my mother," he added, "you might begin with her and finish with me. It is a triumph to please my mother. She is the most penetrating of women. She finds you out like an east wind." He laughed a little. Rachel did not think he had a pleasant laugh.

They paused before a mass of red and white carnations which some florist had thought proper to arrange in the form of a huge spheroid, and Hanna made a pretence of smelling it. "The flowers," he said, "are very fine."

As they turned a tall and imposing woman, with a round, white and deeply lined face, rose from a sofa near by and made a slight beckoning motion, inviting their approach.

"I have been wanting to see you, my dear," she said, as Rachel came up. "You will excuse an old woman's scrutiny with her flattery. You are looking well. Jerome should be delighted."

"I am, mother," he replied impressively.

Rachel speculated upon the slim connection that could exist between her appearance and any additional delight which might locate itself in the mind of Jerome Hanna, but before she shaped her idea Mrs. Hanna went on, fumbling meanwhile with a cascade of ancient lace that descended from her throat. "Mrs. Cotter," she said, "tells me that this is your first party."

"I have been to one or two at the Falls," said the young débutante.

"The Falls?" repeated Mrs. Hanna.

"Baker's Falls," Rachel explained.

For a moment there was a cessation of the lady's fumbling; then it began again. "I don't think," she said, "that I ever heard of Baker's Falls."

"It is n't a very large place," said Rachel, smiling at the crudity of her former social ventures.

"Probably the parties were not very large."

"Not very," assented the girl.

"I was quite sure Mrs. Cotter told me this was your first," Mrs. Hanna affirmed. "I am sure because I was glad to hear it. It seems to me, now," she went on, "that an entire absence of experience is better than any for a young lady to begin with,—at least, better than any she would be apt to get in this country. I used to think that there was nothing like a few years in France, but the last young lady we knew—one who was educated a short distance out of Paris—committed an enormous breach when she came back here. All rules fail. I have had a good many rules but they have all failed. It is very difficult. I am sure you must"—

"You forget, mother," said Jerome, looking at his gloves, "the lack of experience on which you are congratulating Miss Guerrin."

"Her appearance makes me forget it," said Mrs. Hanna blandly, still fumbling at her lace. "Might we not sit down a moment?" and she looked behind her at the sofa she had vacated. The extreme edge of it was occupied by a stout young woman in a very tight dress who immediately rose and slipped away.

But very shortly Rachel, making some excuse, left them, crossed a portion of the room, and went up to her uncle who was standing by the mantel-piece.

"I have come over here to get warm," she said, with an open smile.

"To get warm?" he repeated, looking instinctively at the closed grate.

"I have been with Mr. Hanna and his mother," she added. "Every body leaves me alone when I am with them. I wish they would n't."

"Oh, that is it, is it?" he said with a laugh. "Well, come, we will go. We will go and look for Mrs. Cotter and your friend."

"I don't want to go there, either," she replied.

"Not there? where then?" he asked; but by that time several younger men had collected round her barring her progress, and Halstead again went by, still on the profitable tour which was to acquaint him with the acquaintances of the Cotter family.

Halstead, who had suffered all manner of restlessness after Rachel's departure, contended severely with himself before following her; making up his mind finally that such a course was wholly inadmissible and out of the path of reason; but, fifteen minutes before the train left, looked at his watch, and finding to his great alarm that it was so late hastily packed his valise, and with a nervous chill lest tardiness should defeat him, started hurriedly to seek a further respite from the torment of absence which had so racked him. "There is no other way," he said, which was the formula he always used when temptation was too strong for him.

The first thing he did, after his arrival, was to look up young Short, an object most readily accomplished by lingering upon the steps of the principal hotel of that not over-grown city; and among the first things that young Short said to him, after mentally reviewing

his distinguished history, and casting a critical eye over his trim, alert, and well-dressed figure, was that there was to be a grand fandango there that evening, and if he would go he would rejoice to introduce him. "I will make a lion of you!" he cried, "a lion fresh from the jungles!" And after consulting the time-tables Halstead had kindly consented.

And now he was there, what? The outer angle of stair-case was piled high with exotics, and from somewhere in that region came a flood of waltzes; long trains and pretty feet delicately shod swept over the floor, and handsome men were in full pursuit of beautiful women in evening dress. All that was familiar enough to his experience. He waltzed occasionally with pretty damsels he had never seen before,—it was generally a bore to waltz with strange damsels, however pretty,—and his bland partners smiled upon him.. He had always been smiled upon. Yet it is safe to say that no one there labored more deeply under the inexplicable but fervent intoxication of the scene than he. He wore the manners of composure over the pulse of a young roisterer, and carried a twofold consciousness, one fold of which attended to the minutia of ball-room etiquette and the other to the details of Rachel Guerrin's movements. While he moved slowly and talked calmly, great currents of thought and feeling surged within, and he vaguely wondered at the mystic serenity that surrounded his intensely palpitating life. He seemed to be in a strange atmosphere, laden with imponderable things that quieted his body and excited his brain,—

music, fragrance, passion ; and he felt himself all afloat save for one remaining cable,— his sense of what was due from man to woman in the way of social ball-room conventions,— a cable that would hold until such time as Rachel might be disengaged and he saw a chance to join her. And after that what ? After that might come what would. He was a trifle reckless. He was to conduct himself with care to her side ; she was to take his arm ; and his responsibility in this cold and circumspect life was to end when the weak vessel that contained him drew so near that she might lay her hand upon him.

Meanwhile he drifted about with a young lady in a glory of orange faille and point applique, who was strongly commended to him by his friend Short. Short called her Isabel, and introduced her as Miss Flood, a detail to which Halstead felt strangely indifferent. It seemed to him almost superfluous to name her, since she would serve his turn as well without a name. Beside, he knew her ; he had always known her, or some one so like her that discrimination was unnecessary. She was bright ; she was incisive ; she had had years of balls. She was so gayly self-assured that she could spare her wits from home to play among her neighbors, and she treated him with immeasurable frankness to anecdotes illustrative of human maladroitness. She picked up her train without the least fussiness with reference to her petticoats, and recovered the ends of her yellow braids with equal unreserve ; while at supper, where she ate a great deal, she treated her appetite

with the same freedom she bestowed upon the amiable foibles of her friends. It was during supper that she first distinctly attracted Nathan's notice as a clear and definite individual. They were sitting at one of many little tables upon a wide porch extending across the rear of the house. At one end of the porch was a conservatory where a fountain played, some palm-trees grieved, and some poor relations of the banana family found refuge, and at the other end steps descended to the lighted court; while within the long windows of the parlor there was the continuous whirl of the dancers. They were near one of the windows, and, as the oriole-colored Isabel devoured her peaches, Halstead permitted his glance to wander over the floating population in the rooms.

"Who is the gentleman," he said, "with the portentous eyebrows?"

"Talking to Miss Guerrin?"

"Yes."

"He! why that is Mr. Hanna. You have surely heard of the great Hannas! here two hours and asking who Jerome Hanna is! He is devoted to the young lady with Mrs. Cotter's approval."

"Who, and what, is he? What must a man be to be so approved?"

"He belongs to an old family, a family of mummies, embalmed. They were sitting in their niches here when the town was discovered, and by some pre-historic right owned all the land. He is rich, cultivated, — it would be a pity to think that one so rich was n't

cultivated,— and can do what he pleases; which is nothing as yet. We are holding our breaths and waiting for him to begin."

"Aurora!" exclaimed Halstead.

"You may well say Aurora!" assented Miss Flood.

"What is left to desire?"

"A wife, I believe. It is thought fit that he should have a wife, and they have been selecting her this many a day. Mrs. Cotter, you see, has it in her power to make her niece very desirable over and above her personal attractions. It may make a match; he proposes to some one every other summer, and this is the propitious season."

"What becomes of his propositions then?"

"They fall with the leaf. He reconsiders them, or his mother objects. He has a perpetually objecting mother. This time, however, it stands a chance of being final. Mrs. Cotter and Mrs. Hanna conspire; you and I conspire; all who are here conspire; that is what this party is for. The gentlemen are here to show him off to advantage, and the ladies that she may shine by comparison. It will all be settled between them before the evening is over, with our assistance. Will you call a waiter, please? I will have some grapes,— Delawares,— I always prefer the Delawares."

This little dialogue struck Halstead somewhat heavily, so that once or twice within the ten minutes following he lost himself in vagueness and rallied only with an effort. And later, when a large gentleman, per-

ceptibly over-heated; claimed the hand of Miss Flood, he strolled down into the court to collect himself under the influence of the cooler air. He went on through a long arbor covered with grape-vines, and past rows of neatly trimmed raspberries that grew along the wall, till he came to the lower end of the inclosure. Here, a little aside from the path and under a low-drooping tree, was a seat toward which he directed his steps; but with the fatality attending those of whom stories are told found some one there before him.

"I thought this bench was unoccupied," he explained.

It was Jerome Hanna who rose, and each saw with chagrin his own image in the face of the other. "Be seated," said the darker image politely. "It is cooler out here."

"Your cigar is out," said the other, as if he had been seeking a place to smoke. "Allow me to offer another."

"Thanks, I don't smoke. I came here for comfort. It is what one doesn't often find at parties or they would be more durable. No man should countenance them after he is twenty."

"I take it we came with full knowledge of what awaited us, bringing our years with us," Halstead observed.

"It is a concession that we make to women," said Hanna. "It isn't till the woman question is settled with him that a man can show what stuff he is made of."

"The sooner he settles it then the better," carelessly asserted image number two.

Number one agreed with him. "You are a stranger here," he added abruptly. "A friend of the young lady who visits the house. So she told me."

"In whose honor we recreate at midnight under Mr. Cotter's fig-tree. I don't know but, all things considered, we might honor her in a more appropriate fashion."

"There are half a dozen round her now, never fear."

"The best man," declared Nathan, "will be a favorite of fortune."

Jerome rose with a short laugh. "Are you going in?" he inquired.

"Presently," Halstead replied, seating himself for the first time; but when Hanna had disappeared he too went in. He felt himself a strong man, who could smile, if he chose, at the pretensions of an arrogant rival, but who, if he would smile, must first show his strength.

When, after a circuit of the rooms,—a circuit which always remained in his mind a blank,—he discovered Rachel, she had gone into the supper-room with Hanna, and he was obliged to wait again. He next saw them near the entrance to the conservatory, where a couple in passing had stopped to speak to them, and advancing he joined the group. Jerome turned with the unreadiness of manner which results when one is recalled from personal affairs to social

blandishments, and in the first pause Halstead offered Rachel his arm, murmuring something about a waltz then in progress.

"It has been intolerable in the village since you left," he said, leading her away. "I had to follow you to find a place that was not intolerable."

"You are very kind," she answered, fanning herself.

"Are you glad to see me? — that is the question. You have not said so."

"I am too astonished even to be polite yet."

"I don't know why you should be."

Rachel did not answer, and coming to the end of the porch Halstead desired her to go down.

"Surely we have had enough of gardens," she said. "We did not come from Beaudeck to stroll in a garden. There is another sort of garden on the carpets inside. We might go in and walk on the Axminster nosegays." She seemed to wish to treat him lightly and simply as at first, but he knew and she knew that when the simplicity was real they strolled in the garden as a matter of course.

Halstead did not smile, and made no motion to turn back. "You are not sincere," he said. "That sounds as if you had made great progress. No woman of the world could turn a refusal more neatly than that." And any one to look at him might have thought he was talking about the Chinese lanterns. He gave no cause for gossip among the passers.

"I have made bold to come and see you," he said. "Perhaps I have made too bold?"

"I was not expecting you," she declared.

"Will you be at home soon?"

"In a few weeks."

"So long as that!"

He was much in earnest. She was beginning to doubt; to doubt his lightness this time, and it filled her with vague alarm.

He descended a step or two. "Did you mean," he began, "to break off our acquaintance when you came away, or what did you mean? Did you think a day's journey would put an impassable distance between us, or what did you think? I have not seen you since I lost you on the mountain. It seems to me that in sincerity, and in the respect we accord our friends, you owe me a little less abruptness. Is it not possible that you have done me some injustice?"

He held out one honest hand to lead her down, pointing with the other to the court below. What had he to say to her, so late? Gay groups of gayly dressed people fluttered about through the inclosure; the music careered through the shrubbery; and he stood waiting, pointing with eloquent gesture.

"Come," he said, as one whose urgency precluded paltry excuse; and Rachel descended among the throng.

"You ought to show me over your convent," he said. And then to Rachel's relief they began talking of it lightly as if it were a convent.

"And you are to stay here yet for weeks?" he presently asked. "When you return the summer

will be gone. I will be gone. Everything will be changed."

"That sounds like my reason for coming," she replied.

"Did you mean it? Did you wish it to be so?" he cried. "Do you think it ever really fair to abandon in a twinkling those who are attached to us? You should have told me you were going. You should have left some message. Did you suppose I would consent to an end like that? I have come. I love you. What do you do with those who love you?"

"Is it for to-night?" said Rachel, "or, for to-night and to-morrow too?" And again, although apprehension seized her, she seemed to wish to defeat his earnestness by her smile.

If she did she was wholly unsuccessful. They had reached the end of the walk. Halstead stopped, releasing and facing her, and the wary sentiments which for years had held him let go their grip. "I love you," he said. "I cannot do without you. Marry me, Rachel."

Her gathering apprehensions pressed closely upon her, and she covered her face with her hands. She, then, was the one at fault. Hers the unready, recalcitrant heart! Hers the inactive conscience! Hers the obliquity, She had herself done that of which she had been accusing him.

"I love you," he went on fervently. "I have come. I am here knocking at the sacred common door and eager to get in. It is the prison of prisons. Marry me, Rachel."

The girl let fall her hands and looked at him breathlessly. "Did you come to tell me this?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, lying, without a qualm and without a sign. "I came to tell you." He smiled faintly down upon her flushed and ardent face. "I tell you," he said, "because you are dear to me, and my days and nights are full of you,— because there is a fatality among men to love women,— it came to us long ago and will pursue us forever. There is no escaping it. It is strongest of all, and our plans, our ideas, and all that puny category burn up in it like wisps in a bonfire. Tell me that you love me; tell me that you will marry me, and then"—

He moved nearer her and his eyes shone down upon her like stars in hot weather.

Her look was still searching him. Somehow it seemed to her that he talked a great deal. Then, "I had quit thinking of you," she said.

"Your opportunity is over," he cried. "You must begin and think of me again."

"I don't know what to think," she replied. Indeed, there seemed to be inextricable confusion within.

Halstead narrowed his eyelids, wondering at the coldness he did not expect, but looking at the lolling, throbbing roses on her bosom. "There is no longer occasion for you to analyze me," he said. "You know me well. Think of me warmly. Let me kiss you and think of that,— or better still, cease to think, and love me."

Other voices were coming near and she seemed to be listening to them rather than to him.

"To-morrow all may be different again," she finally said.

"You are afraid," returned Halstead, still confidently, though feeling a creeping, physical disappointment, as she drew away from him. "This is only the beginning. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow you will see the reality of it. They have not involved you in any other scheme down here, have they?"

"I do not know that they have tried."

"Don't you? Well, they have. What is it you doubt? Which of us,—you or me, Rachel?" He would have taken her hands, but she put them again to her face for a moment; then waived them in adieu, and ran into the house by a back entrance.

The young man did not smile. "She is afraid," he assured himself.

For the next hour Halstead lingered in Rachel's near vicinity, and though he neither addressed or apparently observed her, he made her keenly, vividly conscious of those currents of strife and passion which flow through such seemingly complacent assemblies. She seemed to have put her thoughts aside for future consideration. But of Hanna she would have none.

The last carriage drove away with its limp load and its sleepy coachman. The bass viols were wrapped in their green baize cerements; the violins laid in their caskets; and the fat, red-faced musicians, disorganized and dispirited, shuffled mournfully away, as if the last sad rites had been performed, and they could turn once more to cheerfulness and peace.

"It has been a great success," said Mrs. Cotter, "a great success!"

And Rachel, going to her room, mechanically repeated, "A great success."

She went to her window and leaned out to get the night air. She was n't very familiar with the air of three o'clock in the morning. It was deadly quiet. The very breezes seemed asleep. Presently the watchman passed, striking the curbing here and there with his mace; and close upon his heels followed a second and a much more vigilant walker, who stopped in the shadow and looked up at the window where Rachel leaned, still in her silken party attire. She rose, took off her gloves, catching sight of herself in the glass under the soft chandeliers; then put out the lights and threw herself in a deep easy chair; her face in her hands, her dress trailing over the rugs.

Everything in that gray dawn seemed strange and doubtful and complicated.

Presently a little twittering began to stir in the throats of many birds. The light began to tinge the clouds. The yellow tuneful flood spread over the sky and fell into the street. And in the new day all the incidents of the evening seemed made of the warp and woof of a fete rather than the warp and woof of serious life.

The sun grew warm, the singing wild; and Rachel, still at the window, forgot the unreal entanglements which had made the night both terrible and festal, and fell peacefully asleep, the sunshine floating over her

bright-hued dress, — over the roses in her hair and on her bosom.

Halstead had fully intended to return the next morning, but the time for the train came and went, leaving him still in his room. The streaks of morning sunlight that lay across the floor when he first awoke slowly receded under his distract gaze, and it was high noon before he roused himself sufficiently to recall the hour, to rise, dress, and saunter down to breakfast.

In the hall he met young Short, who accosted him in lively, jovial tones. But Halstead put his hands to his ears in mock protest, and motioned him away. "Softly!" he said. "Let me down easy. I am just up and the daylight tastes like warm water. Where was it you took me last night?"

"The very waiters shall talk poetry to you," said Short, "if you will come in and dine with me."

But Nathan declined, and had recourse again to the time-tables; after which he sought his solitary cup of coffee.

In the afternoon, however, he saw Rachel drive past the hotel in a landau, and immediately the necessity of seeing her again was forced upon him. He idled about waiting for the carriage to reappear, but, disappointed in that, waited till the fine line of a new moon floated in the west, and then betook himself in her direction. A sable servant admitted him, and he was at once struck by the different aspect everywhere presented.

Every vestige of the festive decorations had disappeared, and it was difficult to believe they had ever been. Mrs. Cotter was there conferring with a plaintive widow in black, and bowed to him, as he afterward expressed it, from the top of the Himalayas. Rachel was shaking hands with a gentleman and lady whom he did not remember to have seen before, but with whom he had recently talked during an entire quadrille; and a youth was talking with Miss Flood by the window. The latter rose at his approach with such cordiality as might have led a conceited man to suppose she was there in the hope of seeing him, and he at once joined them, taking a share in the conversation but keeping himself informed by some secret process of Rachel's every attitude. "And to think," he reflected, "that till recently she was watching the cattle on the hills grow into money." He meditated upon her successful transfer to the social medium, and thought he would like to have her always adorning just such fine and truly stately parlors, full of company and light. Where the fine and truly stately parlors were to come from no longer troubled him. He had the sublime and lover-like faith, that where his sweetheart was there the parlors would be.

It soon became plain that he would not be able to see her alone, so, even before the necessity of the time-tables demanded, he rose to take his leave. He was much more tranquil than he had been the evening before. The edge was taken off his eagerness. Indeed, he preferred to look upon his success as ultimate rather

than imminent, and for some fastidious reasons relished the idea that she did not drop into his hands with too willing precipitation.

"I must go," he managed to say to her. "I am about to leave Beaudeck, but will go there to see you as soon as I may when I learn you are there. I hope you will believe me in earnest. I shall continue to hope for you."

It afterward struck her as strange that a man should assure the woman he asked to marry him that he was in earnest. In earnest! What else could he be?

XVII.

ONE evening, a few days later, when the callers had gone, Mrs. Cotter came softly back into the parlor. She dressed with great care at this time, and had a softly-bustling, interested manner, as if something were going on.

"Rachel," she began, not, however, as if the matter were of much importance, "I have asked Mr. Hanna to go with us."

"To go with us where?" inquired her niece.

"To the Shoals," replied Mrs. Cotter, straightening the furniture for the night. "He said he would, with thanks. He seemed quite willing. I think he expected it."

"My dear aunt," said Rachel, presently, with some confusion, "I do not think that I can go."

"Not go!"

"I think I must go home."

The lady hesitated a moment. Then, "My child, you are crazy," she said, with benevolent toleration. "Or perhaps you are only tired. Go to bed. We will think of it to-morrow." There was something in Rachel's voice she did not like.

The next morning, however, she returned promptly to the subject.

"I don't understand," she said, more confidently

than she felt, "what the trouble is. It is n't that you do not want the gentleman to go, is it?"

"He can go or not," rejoined Rachel, in the same tone she had used the night before. "You are very kind, but I think I must go back."

"Of course he would n't go if you did n't; but you must see yourself that you might carry matters a little too far. You can't rely too much on him. He has to be treated well. With him one girl is about as good as another, he has seen so many; and if you *are* rather prettier than common you must n't put him too much out of the way. He might not go to Beaudéck."

"I hope he never will," said Rachel.

Mrs. Cotter, who was repairing a minute defect in a napkin, paused a moment at this inscrutable assertion, and then went on again, softly and quickly, as if she would forestall in her niece any precipitancy of resolve. "My dear child," she began, "what is the matter? You should be a little moderate, a little cautious. I don't want to pry into your affairs before you came here, but I was in hopes you had never had any that would interfere with your prospects. I have inquired about Mr. Halstead, too. It seems that he saw a great deal of a Madam Somebody in Paris. He spent a great deal of money there, they say,—more than he could well afford. There are a great many men like him in the cities, though not perhaps with all his advantages. They are not usually marrying men unless you take them very young or very old, and he is neither very young nor very old."

"He is not in Beaudeck," said Rachel positively.
"He has gone away."

"I am sure," resumed the lady, as if after a slight and mistaken digression, "that you have had everything your own way. At the Shoals you might be still more popular. I must say, though, that your manner is rather distant at times. Mr. Hanna said himself that your manner was not quite encouraging, — though you cannot always tell from a girl's manner, — he realizes that. There is a great deal said against coquettes. I have said a great deal against them myself. But without saying anything, everybody knows that it is a great deal worse to have no offers."

"It is too ridiculous," said Rachel. "When it comes to that I hate it."

"Oh, they don't mean anything by it half the time. They don't really expect it to come to anything. I am afraid you are expecting something deep. You may have read too much. You must take men as they are. They are none too good; but nine chances out of ten the best man is the one who can make you the most comfortable. There is n't a better house in the city than Mr. Hanna's, and it is safe to say there is n't a better man. If you had been differently raised you would see it so; Jerome, I think, is serious."

"I don't want to have anything to do with him," the girl insisted. "I never will."

"There is young Garrotson," suggested Mrs. Cotter, experimentally." He is rather dissipated, but his father is a very fine man."

"I don't think he wishes me to marry his father."

"He admires you very much," said the lady soothingly.

"I believe it makes me a little sick," said Rachel.

"What makes you sick?"

But she did not seem to find it easy to define at once whence her sickness rose. "It will be a blow to Jerome," continued her aunt. "He is n't used to it. The very best girls we have accept him."

"And then what?"

"If it is n't one thing it is another. His mother is hard to please."

Rachel made no comments on this astonishing frequency of events she was accustomed to regard as exceptional, and from her silence Mrs. Cotter took hope. "We might, at least, go to the Shoals and have him follow us," she said; "then if you *should* refuse him people would at least know it. As it is they may think he is at his usual tricks. Next to accepting him nothing could start you better than to be known to have refused him."

"It seems to me," said Rachel, "that when I love any one I shall know it. I don't want to be pretending or trying."

"You don't love Mr. Halstead then! I was afraid, — I did n't know, — I could n't help seeing that you wrote to him a day or two ago; and you have n't been in your usual spirits."

The young girl's face colored up in the usual manner, perhaps resenting such forcing of her confidence.

But Mrs. Cotter did not so interpret it. She looked at her closely, her own face undergoing a change of expression, and then went on with her minute repairing. "I did not get you soon enough," she said regretfully. "It will be a severe lesson — more severe than it ought to be for the first. And it will take a great deal of your time. You should have told me you were engaged to him."

"I am not engaged to him," said Rachel, violently.

And again Mrs. Cotter glanced up. "My poor child," she repeated, "I did not get you soon enough."

"I don't want to marry him any more than I want to marry Mr. Hanna," affirmed her niece.

This was very puzzling. The lady had never known just such a case. She had always had a feeling that her protégé was a trifle difficult to understand, to advise, and to lead, but she had not realized till now what she had undertaken. She was as a leader who had not yet found the leading-strings, and who could only sport a little timidly about the pretty erratic creature she would control. "You are not in love with the village minister, or anything like that?" she finally inquired.

"No," said Rachel, growing more laconic and more florid.

"You are a queer girl," exclaimed Mrs. Cotter, in whose mind queerness covered a great deal of ground. "Perhaps you have refused him," she went on making one more venture. "And he may have made you feel unpleasantly. Of course he would make something of

a fuss. My dear lamb, you could not hurt either of them much. Their hearts would recover long before your conscience. In some things you are very inapt."

As she spoke the door opened, and Mr. Cotter entered, his boots freshly blacked, his face newly shaven, and the morning papers under his arm. Rachel went over to him, her face brightening, but he instantly perceived by a glance at his wife that something was amiss.

When the trouble was explained to him, he hemmed, smiled, and rolled his papers into their ultimate compass. "Quite right, quite right," he said. "The girl knows what she is about. Let her suit herself. I would rather like, myself, to see her take Hanna down a peg, but if she is too good for it we can't insist. I believe in letting her do what she likes. She won't be apt to do much better by doing what somebody else likes."

And on the occasion of a subsequent visit the irresistible Jerome Hanna found to his intense surprise that he was no more. He had tested his powers one season too many, and found a foolish young woman to whom his wealth, his prestige, his brains, and his melancholy person were as nothing; so he retired once more into seclusion, and, with the point of a neatly sharpened pencil, traced out the route to Karnak, thence onward to the fresh waters of the Victoria Nyanza. If he could lose himself in Africá he might yet be a happy man, a free man, a man without a mother, without pretensions to sustain, without obligations to

genius,— and in this forecasting of the future he was almost glad that Rachel was so blind. He made up his mind to start in December. In the mean time he would write some political papers. Women were never insensible to fame.

XVIII.

AT the last small station before reaching Beaudeck Rachel looked eagerly out from the car window. The bridge was there and the net-work of ropes, but there was no one about, whom she knew: and neither was there any one at the depot when she arrived at home. The train was late and she was not expected. She almost wished that she had written.

As the stage stopped in front of the house she fancied there was some one watching her from the window of the wing, but she did not look again to assure herself, and ran quickly up the steps. Even within she asked few questions of the ladies who welcomed their beautiful offspring, but kissed them demonstratively and ate her supper with smiling cheerfulness. She inquired where her father was, but her father was not at home. Except to the eye of faith there was no one at home save the three ladies.

It was late, and Miss Hannah had already remarked upon the dissipation of the hour, when Rachel crossed the dark hall, and standing in the open door looked out upon the mountains. The branches of the elms swayed gently to and fro, and some whirling bats made their swift excursions round the upper columns. The half moon was shining. A light was also shining in the wing, and Rachel, her lips half-parted, leaned

against one of the pillars, breathing the soft, illumined air.

There was a step across the porch, and starting, hesitating, she slipped back through the passage to the parlor, but had scarcely reached it when Dayton entered.

She did not advance to meet him, but stood rooted to the floor while he crossed the intervening distance. He looked like a man who suppressed more joy than he showed, and saying something about her return took her hand. Her fingers were quite cold.

"I saw you come," he said. "You had an ominous twist to your veil."

"Ominous?" she replied, finding her voice.

"Stylish, or dainty, or something," he explained, still holding her hand,— "as if you had gone over to the fashionable world whence no woman ever willingly returns."

"I am very fashionable now," she declared.

But there was a flutter about her that stirred his heart to see. He was not to be discouraged. "What brings you home just now?" he asked. "You are ahead of your time. We had prepared our patience for another two weeks. We were to wear along, you know, till sometime next month. Did the Isles of Shoals go down? I believe I heard that they were swamped."

"I did not go to the Isles of Shoals," said Rachel. She seemed to think that, in view of the fact, she might be accorded the privilege of reserving her reasons. But Dayton had no generosity.

"Why not?" he inquired. "Did you grow inconstant to your aunt? Or did you feel a little sickness for your mountains? I have heard that people, the Swiss, for instance, pined when away from their homes. Do you suppose, Miss Guerrin, that any absence could make you pine?"

Rachel opened her fan, a new and large one, with bulrushes on a pink ground, and held it open against her breast.

"I ran out of money," she said, with reluctant invention.

Dayton rather doubted the validity of this excuse, but disappointed in that direction began immediately in another. "I was afraid," he remarked, "that you would not come till we had gone. Some of us have gone already, — did you know?"

"Yes," said Rachel, "I knew. Where did they go?"

He tried to recall the small matter of their exact locality, looking at the face which appeared above the bulrushes. "Miss Duncan," he finally remembered, "has gone home. Halstead went West."

"West!"

"Yes. He thinks of going West to stay. He dissolved with me. He has grown ambitious. I could n't keep him any longer."

Rachel's thoughts seemed to go West too, distressingly; and to bring them nearer home he looked about for seats. "Tell me about your visit," he said abruptly, taking one near her.

"Well, what about it?" she asked, leaning forward, and resting the hand that held the fan across a table.

"I don't care to know that you drove to-day, dined in state yesterday, and danced the night before,—you are not a slip on which such programmes are printed, like most pleasure-seekers; I want to know the effects you have brought away with you."

"It was like riding an elephant," she said, with a smile which was preëminently un-Desborough-like.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I am glad it was as an elephant you liked it."

"I am afraid you expect me to say that I found society hollow. But I didn't. I never found anything yet which was hollow."

"What was it full of?" he inquired. "Tell me about its virtues and its peccadillos. I have had some experience in its vices."

"I have been gone five years," she declared.

"Do you find me much changed? Am I wrinkled? Am I very gray?" — and he smoothed his hair behind.

"You are somewhat gray," she said, looking at his head, but not meeting his eyes.

"But I am still a young man," he asserted. "My eyes are young. My ear-drums are young; and I have the immoderation which belongs to youth."

Rachel took no notice of the intemperance of his manner, and her eyes, which shone over the top of the bulrushes, steadily sought the figures of the ancient wall-paper. "I should not have thought," she said, turning the conversation back a little, "that you had had much experience in its vices."

Dayton assured her he had had a share of that common misfortune, and she wished to know where his social experience had been. He told her in San Francisco.

"Were you dissipated?" she inquired. "Have you great powers of alternation?"

"I have no great powers," he disclaimed.

"Did you float about?" she went on; "and were you engaged to a great many girls off and on,—charmed for an afternoon and heart-broken for a couple of minutes? Were you what they call complicated,—good and bad, serious and not at all serious, in beautiful patchwork?"

Her remark seemed to bear upon something which had come under her own observation rather than upon him, and he did not answer. He looked at her instead with devouring eyes.

"I should think," she said, "that if you were bad, you would be very much so, and if you were good, you could not very well be otherwise."

"Well, which is it?" said Dayton, who was not much given to considering his moral status,—"heads or tails?"

"At any rate," continued Rachel, "there would be some depth to it."

"A man does not want to be too good," observed Dayton; "it is not poetic."

"No, not poetic. You are not exactly poetic," declared the girl. "Nobody has ever made you rhyme."

"Are you going to?" he asked.

"Am I?" she repeated, suddenly rising.

Dayton followed her to the door where she seemed desirous of looking out upon the night, and descending a step brought his face upon a level which interfered with her observation. He seemed to be a very large man as he stood there obscuring the moonlight.

"We are to be friends," he said hoarsely. "You have not forgotten that?"

"We could n't very well be anything else," said Rachel logically.

"We are to be what you will," he cried, — "what you will."

And then he left the night unobscured.

Later, as he walked restlessly about, he saw the light from Rachel's window falling upon the grass, and went out under the elms near where it fell. About his neck he had twisted a handkerchief which she had left in the hall, and stretching himself full length upon an old settee he smiled up at the stars.

The dream was upon him.

XIX.

THE following week ran its rapid course.

Every evening Dayton saw Rachel more or less alone, with no one to warn him, no one to check him, no one to interfere with him, and nothing whatever in his hopeful way. Mr. Guerrin, when at home, was sometimes silently beseeching under his assiduity, but Dayton looked joyfully upon it as a favorable omen, and even had the hardihood, once, to remind him of their earlier conversation. "You know what I am about," he said, "and you cannot blame me if after all I should succeed. It is possible that in time I may succeed."

Halstead had gone. That was the chief, the glaring fact. He had gone to the iron regions West, and many men who went to the iron regions West never again disturbed the serenity of the East. Whatever his affinity for Rachel had been it had resolved into separation, and Dayton was satisfied to rest upon it. His day had come and he would make use of it, irresistibly if possible, to secure his happiness, sure that in the end he could secure hers.

The securing of that happiness, however, even without intervention, seemed as difficult as it was delicate; and while, for purposes of genial comradeship, Rachel seemed ready to bestow her society upon him, he always found himself derided, cheated, swindled in some way

out of his passionate, imperative moods. He never knew how it was done, or why the designs that were in him failed to find expression, but blessed even while baffled the time wore on, and he submitted with a sort of tragic intensity to the influences that delighted and tormented him. She had a way of suddenly summoning a third party into their walks, and a way of treating him as an auxiliary to her more absorbing occupations. She was never so busy, and never had so much company from the village. She permitted him to follow when she went with the Dan Drueys to the orchard where the yellow apples came softly thumping about them on the sod. She let him go with her to do her errands, getting out of the carryall every fifteen rods. But she let nothing interfere with her important duties. She sewed with zeal. When there was nothing else she fanned herself with passion. She came and went unexpectedly, and left him when he thought they had hours before them. Indeed he could never keep her with him very long at a time. She made little excursions with him out from the porch in the starlight, but these excursions seemed as short and fleeting as the excursions made by the bats.

Once, when he had vainly endeavored to lure her out of the sitting-room, where she was persistently playing, he went back to the wing and waited till he saw her go out with a book to the farther end of the portico, where there were some easy chairs and rugs spread over the flag-stones. Then he went through the parlor, and coming upon her corner seated himself without speaking.

Rachel read on for a page or so, but presently half-closed her book as if induced to do so from considerations outside her will.

"It can't be helped," said Dayton, gravely, seeming aware of her motion without taking his eyes from the landscape. "I have no compunctions. I would not hesitate at such a little thing as persecution. I impose myself upon you without a scruple. You are at a great disadvantage in having such good manners. If you were a shrewish, rude woman, now, I could not browbeat you in this way. Perhaps I would n't wish to. But being slight and refined, I don't stop at anything. I can't afford, you know, to neglect any tricks, even the most nefarious. Do you know I have been here four months?"

Rachel submitted to be thus browbeaten without great resentment, but perhaps she did not wish to concede to him all the advantage that he claimed. "There are many ways," she said, "by which a woman, even the most polite and fragile, may excuse herself."

He took her book as she spoke and opened it where her finger had been. "You were on page one hundred and fifteen," he said, laying it down on the other side of him. "Do you know I have already been here four months?"

"Four months, have you?" she replied, resorting for occupation to her fan. "Four months, after all, is a very short time."

"Short for what?" asked Dayton bluntly. "Great events may happen in much less time. A man dies in

a moment. I have heard that in a twinkling he may fall heir to eternal blessedness."

"It seems to me," she said, "that time is very long. There are oceans of it."

"And it seems to me," he rejoined, "that there is very little left. Were you never in any haste? Was there never anything for which it taxed all your powers to wait? I half believe you dread a change, a rupture, a scene."

"Indeed," she answered, flushing warmly and generalizing coolly, "I think that for most things which happen we would do well to wait."

He took from her hands the fan with which he had shared her attention, giving an air of inadvertence to his touch upon her fingers. "Do you think very much of this trifle?" he asked, bending forward.

"No," she answered, simply enough; "I bought some prettier ones when I was away."

"Then, perhaps," he said, "you will give it to me." And putting his thumb in the middle of the sticks he snapped them in two. "It is wonderful," he went on over the fragments, "the amount of industry that can be put into the handling of a fan! Is it such a nice operation that all one's heart should go into it? It seems to me that one might run a much more elaborate machine with less solicitude."

And he looked at her as if seeking for toleration of his violence. "You should at least leave me the pleasure of fanning myself," she presently observed.

"At least!" he repeated, with deprecating cynicism.

"It wears a beautiful dress. Its color comes and goes, and it fans itself for pleasure with a pink fan. What life, what a range of feeling it has!"

But Rachel was not by such means to be betrayed into warmer sensibilities. She would rather see him angry than to see him fervent. She was, indeed, something more than half afraid of the vehemence which he but half concealed under his gentleness, and she knew how feeble were the checks that she could impose upon it. He never lost a step he gained, and he gained a little every day. "One is sometimes reduced to great straits, you know, sir," she replied, growing white in spite of herself. "You forget that I came out here to read. You are unreasonable."

"Yes," he assented, "I am unreasonable. If I were reasonable I would be happy to sit here three or four feet away from you while you read and kept yourself cool. But I am not reasonable."

She rose, and he thought for a moment that she was going away, but she only crossed over to the nearest pillar, and coming back resumed her place. It was plain that she was willing to linger with him in the deep twilight, and looking at her brilliant face he felt assured that however she might refuse to listen to his ambitious passion, it did not so far offend her that she could not find life exquisite in its close proximity. He felt sure she understood him, sure he understood her; and, after all, what wonder was it that a fresh, young girl should resist the stranger who at best must crush her freshness against his heart. He would perhaps

have constrained himself to endure much longer the poignant delight of her nearness and distance, permitting her to grow used to him and imposing upon her a slower familiarity ; but the season of his opportunity was shortening ominously.

"Do you know," he said shortly, as if in explanation of his importunity, "that my work here is almost finished ? "

It had in fact been done three days.

"Where are you going then?" inquired Rachel, with quicker interest than she had yet shown.

"I cannot say. It hangs by a thread. I think some of continuing on the line, and some of going to the Sandwich Islands."

"The Sandwich Islands!" exclaimed the girl.

"Well, call it South Africa, then," he suggested. "In the mean time it is not surprising, is it, that I should depend upon you to ameliorate my last days in Christendom? What else could you expect of even a reasonable man who was closeted with you in so small a town as this? There is n't much to entice one out into the village, you know."

"It does not look very inviting from here," remarked Rachel, looking up the road.

"It is as deserted as a private race-track or a temperance billiard saloon," said Dayton, following her glance.

"What do you know of private race-tracks and temperance billiard saloons?" she asked.

"Upon my soul, nothing," he disclaimed, as if any

connection with those peculiar institutions were particularly compromising.

"I suppose your acquaintance is with the other sort."

"It strikes me now," said Dayton, "that I have heretofore called some very gross and dull amusements pleasure. The real article, it seems, has a peppering of anguish in it."

"What will you do in the Sandwich Islands?" she inquired.

"Heaven only knows," he answered. "I may never go. My mind doesn't work clearly on that possibility. Go? I do not mean to go. I have an idea of a home with the stars shining on it all night — like this."

Rachel did not dare to look at him. "But if you should?", she persisted, pulling at a rose-tree.

"I am not going," he declared. He moved nearer. He had a violent consciousness of her nearness, and of her lips, which had been smiling and now were trembling.

"I believe I must go in," said the girl, rising and looking over her shoulders as women do when they suspect a ghostly chill of striking them.

"You must have a shawl," he cried. "Let me bring you one?"

"No," said Rachel. "I will get it."

"You will not come back."

"Not to-night, I think," she answered gently.

Dayton glowered at the elm-trees, detaining her;

then loosened his hold upon her hand. "I never spent such days as these," he presently said more gently. "If they ever end it will be with a terrible shock. I am not used to it. I am believing in you deeply, deliciously. You could deceive me like a charm. Don't dare be polite to me without a purpose. I beg of you don't smile this way unless you mean it. What you say must be true forever, and if you look at me you must swear to it. It is as much as my life is worth for you to let your color come and go for nothing. And if you are happy you must have an immense resource of wretchedness behind it in case the happiness fails. You are smiling now. You are fairly happy. Lord! how I count upon such simple things as that!"

"I know it, sir," she answered simply and fervently.

And remaining behind among the bats and columns where she left him, he smiled in a warm and broad and in-spite-of-all fashion, blessing himself with that expectant happiness which is so greatly in excess of happiness itself. The wintriness and rigors had gone out of him. He was like a hard-working man, abandoned to the grace of noon. He watched the tender light caress the hills ; he listened to the sentimental cries of the whippoorwills ; he considered the solitary set in families, and believed that he, too, might yet become a part of the jovial, lusty world.

The next evening, after Rachel had walked once or twice up and down the path with only her Gordon setter, she went to the side portico and knocked at the

door. "Are you not coming?" she asked, as Dayton opened it. "It is a beautiful evening."

"Yes, I am coming!" he cried. But he had meant not to go. He had been afraid of taking too much for granted. And at the first pause that beautiful girl had knocked at his door! That knock was certainly honest. And her eyes were altogether honest. She wanted him.

They had not gone far, however, when they met a carriage containing Mrs. Sterling and Louise Mason coming up the drive, and, with some growling on Dayton's part to which Rachel would not assent, they turned back.

"Mrs. Sterling," she said, as they followed the carriage back to the house, "is a charming woman."

"Is she?" returned Dayton, reluctantly. "I am not sure that I know a charming woman when I see one."

"Then I might as well not be charming!" exclaimed the girl with a laugh. But she never looked at him when she made a remark like that.

When Mrs. Sterling returned home somewhat late that night, Joseph Anderson handed her a letter. She read it carefully, then read it again and folded it with contracted brows.

"Louise," she said, "Nathan will be back to-morrow!"

Louise dropped into a chair by the window. "Well, let him come," she replied.

"And why here? Why here from some point in

Missouri! He could see us nearly as soon at home, if that is what he wants."

"Perhaps that is not it," suggested Louise.

"He may imagine that we are going to stay some time longer," pursued Mrs. Sterling. "He does not know that we intend to leave the day after to-morrow. Do you think we can get off as soon as that? I don't want to stay any longer, and I don't think Nathan especially needs the country air. Too much country air dulls one's wits. I'll telegraph him the first thing to-morrow that we will meet him in Boston, and then he can come or not, as he chooses."

"He generally does as he chooses," rejoined Miss Mason, with her desolated smile.

"I should have telegraphed to-night," pursued Mrs. Sterling. "What an unconscionable time we stayed down there! Rachel Guerrin seems very innocent. She is not at all innocent. She is smarter than any of us. I would have great respect for her if I were not afraid of her."

Early the next morning Mrs. Sterling drove briskly through the town to the depot, in whose recesses the telegraph office was secreted. The place was closed, and there was no one to be seen except a philosophical supernumerary who sat in the sun near the water-tank, and whose office was apparently to keep the secrets of the road and prevent the station and tank from being stolen by suspicious-looking individuals, like the one who now presented herself before him.

"Where is the telegraph operator?" she inquired.

"He ain't here," replied the man, resuming his study of the river, as if the subject contained no further interest for him.

"Where can I find him?"

"Home," explained the fellow, still on the defensive. He had evident contempt for the feverish impatience that resorted to the telegraph when there were such worlds of time for more rational communication.

But Mrs. Sterling was not discouraged. "Where does he live?" she persisted.

"Yonder," he replied, nodding toward the north pole.

And finally learning that the homestead in question was a few farms away in the northeast distance, she started hurriedly in that direction, and toiled up to a cottage on the summit of a distant hill, where she again asked for the operator.

"He is out in the fields," said the woman. "But if you want to send a dispatch, you can write it here, and he'll see to it when he comes up to dinner." And she deposited some paper and a bottle of blue mould on the kitchen table, like a person who knew that business was business.

Amazed at the deliberateness that waited upon electricity in that region, Mrs. Sterling explained that it was a matter requiring the greatest haste, and finally succeeded in dispatching a boy across the fields for his delinquent parent.

Yet when the train came in that night, Halstead alighted, his hat drawn over his eyes, his head as erect

as the sky-scraper of a clipper ship, and, getting into the stage, caused himself to be driven past the Desborough place and up the north road.

"Nathan," began his sister, when she saw him alone for a moment after supper, "did you get my telegram this morning?"

"Your telegram?" he said indifferently.

"We are going back to-morrow. I thought you might not care to come for so short a time."

"My dear friend," he returned, after reviewing her critically for a moment, "nothing would have prevented my coming. You mistake the pretext for the reason. I had a profound desire to come."

"Louise"—she ventured—

"Had nothing to do with it," he interrupted, extinguishing the faint hope.

"You have come a long way."

"Do you call this long? You don't know the lengths I am prepared to go."

"It is not difficult, then, to guess the goal for which you have set out."

Halstead shrugged his shoulders in a way to indicate his keen perception of the strange extremity to which he was driven. "It might be well," he said deliberately, as if picking the words from the tree of knowledge, "if I had never come here; yet having come, I must go through the chain of consequences. I have tried to resist it. I ran away from it every other day all summer, but nevertheless I followed her to the city, and here I am following her back. She is too beau-

tiful for me. I don't marry because I want to, you know. I marry because I am in love."

"You will regret it," warned his sister, with despair. Indeed, the family of this gay young man regarded his vocation in life as similar to that of the idyllic youths on the cover of "Harper's Magazine," and that he should assume heavier responsibilities than scattering blooms and bubbles over a grateful universe seemed an act of self-destruction almost criminal.

"Of what use to us, in these matters, is our little inch of foresight?" he exclaimed, with one of his thousand smiles.

There had been a storm that afternoon, which had left the air full of moisture, with airy coteries of clouds floating in all directions. Clouds rose from the river and from the soggy pastures; they rolled over the gardens and lingered in the lilac bushes; they drifted along the eaves and crept into the upper windows; they brushed the hills and reconnoitered the water-courses, till it looked as if the country had surrendered to a mackerel sky. One of these airy puffs had drifted into the porch at Mrs. Anderson's, and, passing through it, Halstead looked first at the sky and then at the muddy road.

"I am going to drive down presently," said Mrs. Sterling, "and if you are going I might take you, I suppose."

But even presently seemed too long to his eager impatience, and he set out on his walk.

When he reached the Desborough place, Miss Han-

nah told him he would find Rachel in the parlor, and he entered without further formality. She was there alone, and the lamps were not yet lighted.

"You are not surprised?" he said, as the young girl rose. "I told you in the city that I would come as sure as fate. I am quite as sure, since I would play the part of fate to you,—what could make a man so sure as that! Dear Rachel, my beautiful Rachel!" he cried. "You are the same; the same, are you, to me?" And again his eyes shone down upon her like stars in hot weather.

"Did you get my letter?" she asked. Her very lips were white. She looked for once like a Desborough.

Dayton was standing behind her in the dusky doorway leading from his apartments, as if he were entrapped in the gloom. Volition had deserted him on the threshold. His brows were knit; and a spiritual darkness seemed to pervade him.

Halstead forbid himself a moment, in obedience to something in Rachel's face, and then his quick eye fell upon his friend,—fell unwillingly, apprehensively.

"Ah, Dayton," he said, advancing, "you are a lucky man. I did not know you were still here. It ought to be the best built bit of road in New England."

Dayton did not take the proffered hand. In fact, he did not see it. He went over to the window, where he stopped again, and looked at Rachel, as if he begged of her some explanatory sign which should turn his ardent chattering into a vapid joke.

But Rachel was entirely grave, — preoccupied, even, and her eyes and ears were for Halstead only. “When did you come?” she asked.

“To-night. You don’t suppose I have been in the neighborhood long. I am not to stay long, either, which is more to the point.”

“Your sister, perhaps, was not expecting you,” Dayton managed to say.

“She thinks that when one goes West he must follow the sun till he reappears to eastward,” chattered the clever fellow. “She does n’t know how easy it is to double on one’s tracks. I went out to look around, as they say out there. I looked around, — to some purpose too, I assure you, — and here I am. How is the road, Dayton?”

“Done,” replied Dayton briefly. “Done.” And crossing the room he went out into the hall, and thence into the street.

He had not gone far, however, when Mrs. Sterling drove up to the curb-stone. She beckoned to him with her fan, as she sent her driver with some message into a low frame house, which was set far back in a yard. There were geese in the yard, and they came strutting and hissing out to the fence, thrusting their necks between the palings, and filing out the gate to repulse the intruders. Mrs. Sterling put her head out of the carriage window and desired him to enter, which he declined. She seemed to have a great deal to say, and it mingled in some way in his mind with the hissing of the geese that were about his legs.

"It is about as bad as it can be," she said, with her pleasant, lively loquacity. "I thought it had all blown over; but not a bit of it. We have deceived ourselves. They are going to be married. He is very sly. He went to the city to see her, and now she brings him back here. It will be a love match. It does n't make any difference whether we go to Boston, or stay here till October, though of course he would stay if we did. And he ought to be at his business. He says she is too beautiful for him. That is n't all of it, perhaps. She is n't artful, but she certainly is n't artless. She has the sense of her own fascinations. She is cleverer than any of us. I should think you would have known when you came here how it would be,—not that I blame you, of course. But it is so terribly different from what we expected for him. That is what took him West, you see. We thought it queer at the time. They will live in one of those benighted Western towns, where they don't care what a man's advantages have been; all they care for is what he can do. Something may happen, but I am afraid it won't. Perhaps he means to take her back. He is very much in love. I suppose you left him there?"

A man came out of the gate bearing a huge white bundle through which appeared innumerable fluted ruffles, and Mrs. Sterling disposed of it on the seat beside her. "I am sorry," she said, nodding again to Dayton from the window, "that we are going so soon, but I suppose you are about to leave, too."

Dayton saw it all then; and the geese which fol-

lowed him saw it all. The hopes he had cherished in patience, in felicity, and in secret turned and pointed their long, fine fingers at him ; and he strode down the street like a wretch who laughs, and at whom all sane things laugh. He wished to creep away, to hide himself and his derangement of grief.

On his return, near midnight, he passed a rapid walker, whom he recognized but who did not recognize him ; then, as he went up the path toward the side piazza, he saw the lamp still burning in the parlor, and a shadow moving about in the half light, — a shadow which he knew. He went to his room and crossed it, as if he would once more admit himself into the presence of love and midnight, but just inside the door he stopped, the expression of self-derision curling his lips anew. What, after all, could he say to her ? What could he say to her in the light from which Nathan Halstead had just slipped ? What had he to say to the sweetheart of his friend ? He had no dexterity, no complaisance. He hated complaint. He hated petitions. He hated the hopeless turmoil in his own breast and the smiling responses awarded it by the exquisite Rachel Guerrin. The passionate discouragement which she had given him had been sincere, and the pretty countenance which she had sometimes shown his ardor had been but a part of the sweet craft inseparable from the nature of a beautiful woman. Perhaps she would again woo him with her innocent and dainty deceit if he should enter. She was still so near, still so sweet. He had visions of her approaches, her gestures. He

heard the rustle of her dress, and felt the breath of the air as she swept past him. Then he laughed again, and packed his valise.

The next morning, as he was going out, Rachel descended the stairs. She was very late, and she came slowly. He waited for her by the heavy walnut newel, and then offered her his hand. "I know no way to take leave of you," he said. "The common adieu won't set me adrift."

There was something lurking in his face that changed the brightness of the morning into a sullen, surcharged blackness, and she stood dismayed, as he turned abruptly and went down the path toward the gate.

"Why did n't you say good-by to him?" inquired Miss Hannah, passing briskly through the hall. "He is not coming back."

"Not coming back?" cried Rachel, incredulously.

Presently she ran down through the garden, and watched with unbelief the train that carried him away wind along the river-bank. It was a shining September day, and the ivy and sumac were red upon the grave-yard wall. She leaned over it among the brilliant, expiring leaves, and the hush about her grew deep, the solitude dense.

Mrs. Sterling, upon the train, was calling attention to her brother's indisposition. "He came in very late, last night," she said, with amiable raillery.

"I got caught in the evergreens," he responded, with his intrepid smile.

XX.

In October Dayton started for California. It seemed to him that if he could put the Rocky Mountains between him and the scene of his ineffectual passion he might begin to multiply the years with some hope of forgetfulness. New England was too small. He could at any time stretch himself and touch the hem of Rachel Guerrin's dress,—a touch in which there would be no healing. The cities were full of faint resemblances to her, and at every point there was a possible intersection of their paths. He found himself thinking of her as he strode past the flower-stands. He found himself looking for her among the pedestrians who hurried along the sidewalks, and among the pretty frequenters of shops. He was too near. There was danger that he might meet her, and it was possible that he might not. He speculated upon the idea of meeting her, and wondered in what dumb fashion he would stand it to see her again come near and again sweep past him. Once when he thought he saw her he looked again, but it was only a shabby little girl casting an eager, long-fringed glance over some engravings in a window; and once, impelled by an irresistible likeness, he followed a tall, slight figure into a palace car. It was after that he determined to go back to California.

Not long before he left, Mrs. Sterling saw him upon the street in Boston, and driving up to the pavement offered to take him in her victoria to whatever point he was bound.

"I am on my way to San Francisco," he said, lifting his hat.

"Very well, get in," she responded, making room for him by a new disposition of her flounces. "I am going in that direction."

He took the place beside her, and they rolled westward down the avenue. "Going to San Francisco!" she exclaimed, smiling at him under her pretty parasol. "I am sorry to hear it. We can't afford to lose you. We have n't much to lose in the way of your society, to be sure, but we feel that you help give a solid support to the light, social superstructure. And then I am expecting Rachel Guerrin. I thought that if you did neglect me, — and you have, you know, unpardonably, — you would summon some principle and call upon her. Where have you buried yourself? Your habits are the most incorrigible I ever knew. They are worse than bad ones. A reprobate *can* reform, but a good man never. I have been trying for years to mitigate your seclusion, and the moment I have some positive obligations on my side you escape to the Pacific slope! I give you up."

"I have given myself up," he said; "I am going on the twenty-seventh."

"She may be here before that!" the lady returned. "I have written to her to come right away. . . . Na-

than is n't here now," she added, smiling. "But then if that affair ever *should* come to anything, as I suppose it must, I should like to have shown her every attention. At any rate, it can do no harm. We will give you a farewell dinner."

"Don't think me uncivilized," he answered, "but I will be very busy. You must n't count on me."

And after that he was in a fever to be off. Even when seated in the car in the compartment assigned him, it seemed to him that the train would never pull out, and from the window his eyes roved over the passengers coming and going, in the hope and fear of resting for a moment upon the figure of the woman who could command his resolution.

He was in the great West, where some bleak winds were blowing, before he felt that he had truly started, leaving the summer far behind him.

His fever then abated. His haste gave place to a strange, dull leisure. It was a great country, and it made no difference where he went or when he got there, if he ever got there. He thought of Rio Janeiro and of New Orleans with greater longing than of San Francisco, and his mind, which had been running in a deep and narrow sluice, suddenly broke in a shallow inundation all over the Western plains. Time seemed endless, and economy of it as absurd as it was useless. When he found himself in California, what then! His legs were cramped with long sitting, and as the train stopped in one of the far Western cities he rose, took his valise, and sauntered out without a purpose into the noisy

depot. The wind was still bleak. The gas-lights burned dimly, while waiting for the later darkness. The streets looked unfamiliar. It was the unfamiliar he wanted; and hailing a cab he desired to be driven to a hotel which he named.

He registered his name, was assigned a room, ate his supper, and strolled back to the rotunda reconnoitring in his indifference for a mode of spending the evening. He was not good at picking and choosing among entertainments. Too often there was a large deficit between social amusement and his unamused spirit,—a deficit which measures the degree one is bored. He bought an evening paper from habit, and not because he wanted it, and was about to withdraw from the office when a brisk young man entered, and singling him from among the many loungers crossed the checkered marble with a ringing step.

Dayton surveyed him at arm's-length, feeling that in stopping short of the Sierras he had allowed himself too short a radius. The two had not met for weeks, and in this sudden encounter there seemed to be the shock of forces still conflicting. Their old and genuine friendship had collapsed like a balloon, and they shook hands as strangers; one a tall, plain, and unpretentious man, and the other a trim, alert young fellow, with one tooth broken and two vertical lines between his eyes.

"I saw you get off the train," said Halstead. "I was looking for you. I am here to meet you. I have been expecting you for weeks. You have been in the air. Have you had your supper?"

"Those who know you best should n't be surprised to see you anywhere," said Dayton shortly. "You look well and prosperous. Where are you from?"

"From the furnaces south. I am building one. My sister writes me you are on your way to California."

"Yes."

There was a short, speculative pause on Halstead's part. Then, "What are you going to do to-night?" he asked.

"I have made only a slender provision," replied Dayton, holding up his paper, and glancing with an involuntary contraction of the brows at the head-lines.

"Nothing in it," said Nathan, "unless you read the crimes and casualties. Nobody wants to live out here; or if they do, they don't want anybody else to. There is an opera," he added, after another speculative pause. "'Aida,'—arranged for the successors of the purple Pharaohs. Suppose we go."

Dayton cared about as much for the opera as he did for the Pharaohs, but his ears were waiting in suspense for communications from this readily communicating young man.

"Very well," he assented. "But we must make haste."

A few minutes later they were seated in the parquet, from which they immediately addressed their attention to the stage, with an appearance of absorbing interest which struck Halstead as grotesque in its gravity,—a gravity, however, which his sense of the grotesque failed to relieve. The dress of the princess, which was

of a peculiarly scant and oriental order, secured his admiration for a few moments, and as one by one the unhappy warblers fell with heavy thuds upon the boards he was momentarily drawn from his reflections ; but upon the whole the brilliant portrayal of love and defeat failed to beguile him from the realities it counterfeited. When the noble imitation princess writhed around the dark pilasters of the royal imitation palace, wringing her hands in imitation anguish, he involuntarily turned to his companion ; but Dayton might as well have been sitting on the side portico, looking professionally at the Beaudeck mountains, for all his face betrayed ; so repressing the comments which were upon his tongue, he turned again to the lively painted spectacle.

After the opera was over they returned to the hotel, and went into the reading-room, which was empty. It was growing late, and still they did not separate. The purpose which had brought them together seemed not yet to have completed its design.

"Dayton," said Halstead, abruptly, leaning over one of the tables, "how about Beaudeck? Have you ever been back?"

"No."

"Not since the morning we left there together?"

"No."

"Nor I. I have had it on my mind to say something to you about that matter," he proceeded. "I could n't let you get away without it. That is what I am here for. I can't afford to feel shabby and dis-

reditable before you, and I owe you a bit of delicate frankness. I should have told you then and there. I knew it, but I sneaked away with honors, perhaps, that did not belong to me. I thought you would find it out for yourselves, but I am afraid you have n't. My sister, I know, labors under a delusion. As for you, you suspect me either of being a trifling character or a great success. I don't know which."

Dayton looked black. He could scarcely endure this incisive young man among his wounds, and he was slow to take in his meaning. "I suspect you of both," he said; "first one, and then the other. Let us make short work of this."

"It was a dead failure," the young man proclaimed. "There is no diversion in making love to such beauty as hers. You might as well go up to a torch. I don't pretend to say that I was above lightly abusing their hospitality at first, but in the end I was as serious as — as you. I know it, and so do you. There were two of us, and only a chance for one, and I would n't get out of your way, even when I knew you were in earnest and I was n't. I had the start of you, but I lost somewhere on the road. I never knew just where. Perhaps"—

"Perhaps what?" said Dayton, interrupting the fine analysis which was lasting all night. "Perhaps this! Perhaps that! Perhaps a thousand things! Do you suppose I would ask a wife at the hands of even a brilliant fellow like you? That I would win her by such propitious means as your getting out

of my way? You have done me no wrong. Perhaps she is going to marry you, and perhaps she is not,—that is the point."

"She is not," declared Halstead.

"Not?" repeated Dayton.

"It was a dead failure," Halstead went on, as if to finish more elaborately while the mood was on him. "I tried, and could not make it. I followed her when she went away, and asked her to marry me before I knew it; then followed her back to Beaudeck, and asked her again, knowing it that time. Jove! the effect of failure is out of all proportion to the effect of success, if a fellow had it. I would have grown used to success in half the time I have spent groaning over the nothingness of this result. It seems she wrote me a letter, which I did not get till later,—a half-penitent letter it was," he added, with a singular laugh. "But when I went back the last time, she would n't even compromise with me for a longer trial. It was better I should have asked her. I think that after all she was glad to know I wished it. It rather put me right with her; and I believe she thought her refusal would only put her right with me. Perhaps you had something to do with it. I suspect, without reason, mind you, that you had. Yet here you go to San Francisco. What takes you there?"

Dayton stared at him as at a sentimental acrobat. "Nothing takes me anywhere," he stammered, the light breaking in upon him.

"You, of all men," cried Nathan, with eloquent

mockery, "to be crossing the Continent by express,—to swing your valise, and cry Westward, ho! A passionate pilgrim! A fugitive from fortune, from felicity! Go back to Boston. Rachel Guerrin is there. Go back and make yourself glad. I wish I had your chance. You have been fooled by your modesty,—by that fine reserve of yours. Even you can be a fool. If any one deserves his heart's desire, it is you. Go back and get it. You to migrate! You to be going West!" And, rising hastily, he crossed the room, gesticulating as he went.

"Halstead! Halstead!" Dayton shouted after him. He wanted to embrace him. But the young man had gone.

Dayton sank back in his chair, and with that cerebral trick which mingles the slightest conceits with the deepest emotions, recalled the cry of an auctioneer which he had heard that evening in passing: "Going! going! Easy as the wind blows, easy as the water flows. He who says nothing wins nothing." Presently his face relaxed, and took on the same expression it had worn in the short and tender season of his hopefulness. Then the fire came into it, and going to the office he inquired when the first train left for the East.

On the early evening of the day he arrived in Boston, he was admitted into Mrs. Sterling's library. That lady was toasting a pair of very pretty slippers before the fire, while a blonde student, with a timid manner and a bouquet in his button-hole, seemed to be serving as an incentive to a conversation between her

and Rachel. At first he thought the young girl changed and somewhat colorless, but a moment later wondered that he could ever have thought her pale. She wore a long black dress very high about the throat, and her hair was twisted in the fashion in which she had arranged it in the mountains. Yet the surroundings were new. There was an indefinable difference, and she seemed further from him than at any time since he left the reading-room of the Western hotel. What wild idea was that of tender familiarity toward her? The very precision of her dark costume forbade him.

When the stir of his unexpected arrival was over, they began talking of California, whither he was still supposed to be going shortly. They talked about the winds, the droughts, the rich imagination of Nordhoff; about the Chinese, the tea-trade; about the Sutro tunnel; about the climate of Santa Barbara,— till the timid scholar, who from time to time had urged himself into saying something, rose and bowed himself away.

When the door closed behind him, Mrs. Sterling again placed upon the fender slippers of the size and style which require the constant application of heat, and began in an expository way to set forth some of the peculiarities of the learned man who had just gone, and whom she spoke of as Archie Pennefeather.

She told Dayton she meant yet to give him his farewell dinner, and getting a pencil and bit of paper wrote on it the names of several persons whom she would like to invite on that occasion, asking his approval of each one with gracious deference. She told him, too,

how glad her husband would be to see him, and insisted that he should remain till his return.

Presently, however, she began to wonder at a call which, for him, was so unprecedented in length; and judging it best, she heard a sound that called her, temporarily, to another room.

Rachel went to the window and looked out for Mr. Sterling; but that, of necessity, was a respite which could not last long. When she came back the room seemed strangely small, and Dayton confronted her with the old imperative fervor.

"I heard you were here," he said. "I have come in search of you."

"I am not hard to find at any time," she replied.

"But you may be easy to lose. I thought I had lost you. Will I lose you if I prove a little too glad to see you? How glad shall I dare to be?"

"Oh, quite glad," she said, negatively still.

"As glad as this?" he asked, taking her hands. He meant, if possible, never to let them go, but he needed to explain it to her. He wanted to tell her that he had made a grim mistake, which had torn him from the mountains, and sent him far on his way toward the Pacific. That if she would ever make room for him near her she must do it then. That he loved her. That if it were possible she would ever marry him, she must give him a hint of it to live upon. But the words for this immensity of conversation seemed scattered through a lost language, and he only stared at her with his imperative fervor. The lights burned

faintly. She was very near him. He raised her hands to his shoulders. His imperative passion compelled him, and he put his arms around her.

Three days later Nathan Halstead presented himself at his sister's door.

"You were hardly expecting me, I suppose," he said to her. "I have been traveling for days, for weeks, for months. There is a friend of mine whom I never see that he does n't tell me how far he has traveled within a given time. 'Two thousand miles in the month of June,' he will say; or, 'I 've been East twenty-nine times since a year ago the tenth of November.' I smell railroad smoke whenever I see him. But I excuse him. I wonder now that I ever fancied him a bore."

"Come into the library," said Mrs. Sterling, to whom this last surprise promised a solution of the phenomenon preceding. "Which would you prefer,—a lounge or a lunch?"

"I have lunched, thank you," he replied, as he followed her into the cosier room, which was fitted for greater confidences. But instead of taking the lounge, he stood with his back to the fire, his eyes wandering through the open doors. "What is going on?" he asked. "What is your latest item? Where is Rachel Guerrin?"

"Rachel? She has gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes,—home. She left this morning. Did you expect to see her?"

"I wanted to take another look at her. It is what I came for. And Dayton," he added, "has he been here?"

"Yes."

There was an interval during which a perceptible shrinkage took place in Halstead's expansive being. "Well, go on," he said. "What success did he have? Tell me all the horrible particulars."

"They are engaged," said Mrs. Sterling. But her listener received this abrupt disclosure as if prepared to hear it.

"Where were they?" he inquired; "and when was it,—noon or midnight? Was she as beautiful as ever? You never thought, did you, to warn him against the regrets which might overtake him? How often did he see her?"

"Twice,—night before last and last night."

Halstead drew his brows more closely together. "And a revolver," he said presently, "is no longer the proper thing. Neither is a bed of charcoal. We are taught in these milder days that time is full of redress, and that susceptibility is our genius. I have still much time. I have still great susceptibility." And he laughed, as if in his insight into his susceptible nature he found something pitiable and humorous. But in spite of his shrug and his smile, there was something in his voice and in his eyes indicative of real disappointment and regret, and, seeing it, his sister asked no questions.

Presently he took from his pocket two letters,—one

from Rachel Guerrin, and one, still sealed, from Paris, directed in a lady's hand. He dropped them both into the grate. "What is there," he asked, "to occupy a man who has an evening on his hands? Is there any place to which you care to go? What is at the theatres?"

"There is Louise," suggested Mrs. Sterling.

"My dear sister, I can't do it," he said, replying rather to her significance than to her suggestion for the evening.

"She was terribly disappointed over you."

"We are all disappointed," Halstead observed, beginning again to generalize brilliantly. "The difference is, that some of us rally and some of us don't. The part of wisdom is to rally. I feel destined," he added, "to be a little, light old man."





